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Z A I D E E



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A Romance

BY

MARGARET OLIPHANT

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS  
EDINBURGH AND LONDON  
MDCCCLVI

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED IN BLACKWOOD'S MAGAZINE.

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# Z A I D E E

## BOOK I.



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## C H A P T E R I.

### THE GRANGE.

“SOME call it the Uplands, sir, and some call it the Grange,—to us hereabouts it is nought but the Squire’s house ; that’s the name.”

Such would be the answer of the Cheshire peasant of whom you asked the designation of this old-established family dwelling-place : it is both the Uplands and the Grange in reality, but the Squire’s house, its simplest and most common distinction, is sufficiently satisfactory. The scenery about is Cheshire scenery—nothing grand or elevated certainly, but, after its bare, bleak, windy fashion, wild enough to please a moderate taste for desolation. The principal feature in the landscape is a low rocky hill, where a shelf of bare brown whinstone, almost as hard as granite, alternates with

a slope of that close, slippery hill-side turf, rich with thyme and low-springing plants of heather, with bits of clover and crowflower, and infant prickles of furze, which seems to seize and hold fast the warmth of sunshine better than the most velvet greensward. A strange, eerie-looking, solitary windmill, the very picture of useless labour, flapping its long solemn wings in the air, crowns one dreary mound ; on the other is a small round tower of observation, surmounted by a gallery, whence you can look out upon the sea ; and the summit of this dreary little hill, and these two buildings standing out abrupt and gaunt from its points, strike sheer upon the sky without a softening tree. To be so minute in real extent, and so slightly elevated, the loneliness and silence of this place is remarkable : below it a long stretch of pasture, the flattest and least varied of Cheshire fields, stretches away towards the bleak sandbanks and unfeatured coast,—a treacherous shore, where the waves roll in strong and wild, with a tawny foam and ocean force, but where there is scarcely either rock or headland—nothing but the border of dry and powdery sand, and the hidden shifting banks that make this shore so dangerous, and without either beauty or interest to claim a second glance from an unacquainted eye.

The trees of the district are few and scanty ; twisted and struggling oaks, Scotch firs, gaunt and defiant,

bits of half-grown hedgerow, and wild dishevelled willows. On the sheltered side of this hill alone a young plantation flourishes ; and under the shadow of these trees, closely folded into a cosy nook of this strong-ribbed iron miniature of a mountain, lies the Grange or Uplands, the Squire's house of the adjacent village, and the scene of our tale.

The house is such a moated Grange as Mariana herself might have inhabited ; a far-seeing, wistful, solitary house, commanding long lines of road, along which nobody ever travels. The freest heart in the world might pine at one of these deep antique windows, and grow aweary of its life, looking along the roads from the Grange ; and the Grange stands straining all its dark glowing eyes into the day and into the night, as if on constant watch for the expected stranger who never comes out of the wintry windy horizon. It is a rare chance, indeed, when there is not a reddening of storm in the sunset which blazes upon this uplying house—a still rarer joy when the morning comes without the chill breath of a sea gale—and the sea itself could not witness a wilder riot of wind and brewing tempest than rings about the ears of the dwellers here through many a winter night. The old house never wavers of its footing for such an argument, but stands firm upon the little rocky platform over which a lawn, which has been green for centuries, mantles warmly,

and, stoutly defiant of the winds to which it has been used so long, sets its back against the hill, and holds its ground.

In a semicircle round the front of the Grange is the moat, which in these peaceable days is nothing better than a pond enclosed in broken masonry, the evil qualities of which bit of half-stagnant water are numerous, and would be more so in a less breezy locality, while its sole good one is an innumerable crop of water-lilies; but no one has the heart to destroy this bit of antiquity, and every one is proud of the swan-like floating flowers. Behind the house rises the rocky defence of the hill, so sheltered here that it is green with the richest turf, and draped with wealth of hardy, ruddy, half-alpine flowers. Fruit-trees and blossoming shrubs do not refuse to grow under this verdant shadow, and within the warm and well-defended enclosure; and they say it is summer in the garden of the Grange many a day after the autumn winds are wild upon the dreary fields of the level country, and when the last hollyhocks are dying in the cottage flower-plots below. Modern requirements have made sad havoc in the regularity of the building—modern improvements, beginning in the days of Elizabeth, have thrown out oriel windows, and enlarged casements, and built additions, till the Grange, though still not very large, is a cluster of houses, a domestic chronicle of architecture

in its own person, and has just that graceful medley of styles and periods, which, with the ivies and mosses of old centuries, and the living flowers of to-day, combine to form the finest harmony of a hereditary dwelling-place.

Within, there is an old hall, no longer used or possible to use in these days. Remnants of old armour, a faded banner, and an emblazoned coat-of-arms, give something of ancestral dignity to this ancient apartment ; but the modern servant, who goes soft-footed across its echoing stones towards one of those closed doors, which break the wall, looks strangely out of keeping with the variegated pavement, the great wide chimney, and lofty window, which he passes in his way. No longer the rude retainers of an old Cheshire barony to make this vaulted roof ring again, and yonder old oaken table groan,—one mild-spoken man of all employments, in his rusty black coat and white neck-cloth, like what the parish vicar might have been a hundred years ago, carrying his tray to the modern drawing-room,—and as he opens the door, the modern luxury of a soft Persian carpet appears just edging the pavement of the hall. The wonder is, after all, that there is so slight an incongruity felt and visible between the antique life, chill here without in the ancient apartment, and the modern life, warm and full of comfort, which meets it on the threshold of the modern room.

It is an autumn evening, and the whole family are assembled within. The room is large—very large for the dimensions of the house—stretching from the broad and heavy mullioned window which looks towards the front, to the long narrow modern sashes which open upon the green turf and trim walks of the garden behind. More than one smaller room opens from this drawing-room, and the family must be a tolerably affectionate and harmonious family, or it could not bear such close neighbourhood. One door, which you would fancy to open directly into the wall, opens instead into one of the oddest little nooks of building, as bright as daylight, all a-glow with a great round window, where, with fairy book-shelves and a miniature piano, with little ottomans and couches, dainty with their own needlework, the young ladies of the house have made themselves a bower,—for only the young ladies' maid, who is much the finest person in the family, calls it the boudoir. Just at the opposite end, running off at an angle, a low one-storeyed addition to the original house is the gentlemanly retirement, the library, a larger, graver apartment—less gay and more comfortable; while the mother claims as her own exclusive property, a door opposite the ever-open door of the young ladies' room. The matron's “closet” is always closed, and is a sober, lady-like housekeeper's room. So, each separate interest having

its separate possession in a cluster round the drawing-room, it is less wonderful to find the whole family assembled here.

You cannot mistake the lady of the house in dignified possession of her little work-table and her easy-chair ; but that rich gown of dim black silk, and that snowy widow's cap, coming close round her face, make it very evident that Mrs Vivian of the Grange is the Squire's mother, and no longer, what she has been for thirty years, the Squire's wife. The easy-chair is by no means a low chair, and the footstool is rather higher than usual, from which you may divine that this representative of domestic sovereignty is a very little woman. Little in stature, though by means of high heels and other innocent devices this good gentlewoman makes the most of what she has,—and most becomingly little are those lady-like and delicate hands, and the small feet which Mrs Vivian slippers so handsomely. As nimble as they are small, you would never fancy these active fingers had seen fifty years' good service, nor this alert little figure travelled the ways of mortal care so long. Mrs Vivian will tell you that she has had “her own share” of trouble ; but for all that, there is not a lighter foot in the household than belongs to the mother of all.

At the table near her sits a stately personage, whom it is a perpetual wonder to Mrs Vivian, and all Mrs

Vivian's friends, to call her first-born. Five feet ten at the smallest measure, with the bearing, as she has the manner, of a princess, Elizabeth Vivian could carry her mother under her arm like a child. And then Elizabeth's great dark liquid eyes, her hair so very dark brown that the universal opinion calls it black, her lofty features, and her air of unconscious queenliness, which neither comes from the good Saxon Squire, who has slept at rest for two years now in the chancel of Briarfard Church, nor from the little brisk mother who sits by her side—whence did they spring, those stately beauties? But no one can explain the mystery, and Elizabeth's mother consoles herself with the resemblance of mind which her daughter bears to various members of the family ; and, very proud of her daughter's distinguished looks and singular grace, manages to be content.

Busily knitting a purse at the window is Margaret, a pensive beauty, just touched with sentimentalism. Both these young ladies have had the evil fortune to be borne older than the heir, so that Margaret is actually two-and-twenty at this present writing, and Elizabeth full two years older—a state of matters very dreadful in the estimation of wild pretty seventeen-year old Sophy, who lies on the carpet playing with the oldest and shaggiest of greyhounds, a privileged visitor of the drawing-room. There is no mistake

about Sophy's sunny eyes and golden hair, her lilies and roses of sweet complexion, and her gay simplicity of heart ; her mother has had no difficulty in finding out hosts of kindred whom she resembles, and Sophy is the family darling, the beloved of the house.

The heir has not quite attained his majority. Yonder he sits in his father's chair reading the newspaper, which was his father's oracle, and absorbed with a young man's eagerness in the political news of the day ; an impatient start and "pshaw" now and then, tempts one to suspect that Philip Vivian does not quite feel the force of his father's principles ; but the dreadful thought has not yet dawned upon his mother, who looks up at him now and then with motherly admiration, thinking, with a smile upon her kind lip, and some unshed tears about her heart, how well he fills his father's place, and what credit he does to his father's name.

Still another member of the family, whose age is half-way between the ages of Philip and of Sophy, has a corner and a writing-table to himself. This son is the least handsome of the whole, though his eyes are finer than Elizabeth's, and his head a nobler head than even that lofty one, clustered all over with rich brown curls, which Philip carries like a young prince. But a great deal of frolic and mischief are lurking in Percy Vivian's eye, and he has a doubtful wavering smile,

which is sometimes so very bright and tender, sometimes so scornful, sometimes as pensive and sad as Margaret's. Everybody knows he is very clever—but what more he is, nobody does very well know.

Are these all? Still one little personage remains yonder, coiled up in a corner, embracing a book; a girl of fourteen, in the angular development peculiar to her age, which may turn out either ugly or beautiful for anything that can be prophesied. Not such a little personage either,—half a head taller than Aunt Vivian, with long arms, long fingers, long hair, and eyes that shine in fitful brightness—eyes that, shadowed by Zaidee's long eye-lashes, are stars never visible to strangers. Percy says these same eyes are liable to eclipse any day if but a new book arrives, or an old one is discovered; but Zaidee, with her odd name, her odd ways, and her girlish romance, has a supreme contempt for Percy's wickedness. A poor little portionless orphan cousin, heretofore the plaything, now the wonder and favourite of the house, endowed with every nickname into which her own very unusual name can be twisted, indulged in most of her caprices, laughed at for her romantic fancies, and permitted more of her own way than is perhaps quite good for her, Zaidee, in *her* character as pet, never comes at all in Sophy's way. Pretty, good, wild, merry Sophy, it is easy to laugh at, to caress, to spoil

her—but nobody wonders at *her* or her devices, and her cousin and she have quite a different standing-ground.

Thus dwelling in old-fashioned comfort, and thus grouped in their bright sitting-room, Mrs Vivian, as best becomes her, is the first to speak ; but as it does not become a lady of Mrs Vivian's importance to come after so long a monologue of her obscure historian, we will turn another leaf, and transfer to another chapter what Mrs Vivian says.

## CHAPTER II.

## A FAMILY PARLIAMENT.

AND this is what Mrs Vivian says—

“I wish you would put down your paper, Philip ; I do wish, Percy, you would be done with that perpetual scribbling ; and, Elizabeth, just put those accounts aside—lay them in my room ; I’ll get through them in half the time. Where is Margaret ? Come here, all of you, children, and tell me what we are to do when Philip comes of age.”

“Oh, mamma, such a dance we could have in the hall,” cried Sophy, deserting her shaggy playfellow. Sophy had a true genius for advice, and never failed to be first in a family consultation.

“I should think now a great dinner of our large tenantry,” said Percy, “with illuminations in our metropolis of Briarford, and a rustic ball out of doors. Eh, Philip ?— and the mightiest beer-barrel in the country broached for the occasion, and a holocaust of the great ox : there’s a festival for you—like a

good old English gentleman. Don't you think so, mother?"

"A rustic ball out of doors?—but then everybody would be blown away; unless, indeed, it could be in mamma's flower-garden," said Sophy, taking the matter into serious but somewhat dismayed consideration; "for Philip's birthday is in November; and I'm sure the heaviest man in the parish could not dance out a gale there on the lawn,—what do you think, mamma?—and as for a tent, you know—and they must have a tent to dine in—you couldn't put up such a thing for the wind,—mamma, do you hear?"

"Percy, in his capacity of minstrel, singing the birthday ode to the assembled retainers," said the heir; "a great idea, mother; two public events in the family in one day—the advent of a poet, and my coming of age."

"Now, boys, be quiet," said the mother; "nobody looks for good sense from you;—in household matters, Philip, ladies are the only judges; but though you cannot suggest, you may listen and advise. I don't say I have not my own plans; but, girls, speak out—let me hear yours."

"Yes; but what about the tent, mamma, and the ball out of doors?" said Sophy, who was somewhat pertinacious, and never rejected a proposition without a fair discussion of its merits.

“Nonsense, child,” cried the brisk old lady. “Now, Elizabeth, what have you to say?”

“Only that I hope you will all make up your minds to something very pleasant, mamma,” said the queenly beauty, with the sweetest of gentle voices, and an air that made her almost childish words quite majestic; “and then you may be sure I will do all I can to carry it out.”

It seemed that every one was quite prepared for this speech—that nobody had the slightest expectation of a suggestion from Elizabeth; for, before she finished speaking, her mother had turned to the next in succession on the family roll.

“Oh, I think we could ‘do’ the hall like what it might be two hundred years ago,” cried Margaret eagerly; “and put John and the maids into those old livery dresses, and go into costume ourselves; and then Philip could sit in the old chair of state, with the old tapestry hangings round him, and receive all the guests, like an old country baron, as our forefathers were; and the great old table, and the silver flagons, mother; and all our ancestral things that nobody ever uses; and then, you know, after dinner we could take off our dresses, and come into the drawing-room and have Mr Powis to read poetry to us, and as much music as we can muster, and Percy’s ode—and so end the evening with an intellectual party like what one reads of. If

you would only all make an effort, I am sure we could do it if we tried."

"And have no dance at all!—nothing but songs and stupid verses, and talking of books no one cares about," said the disappointed Sophy. "Don't yield, mamma; oh, don't give up the tent, Percy! I would rather have a game at romps with all the children in Briarfard;—an intellectual party!—don't, mamma!"

"I object to going into costume myself," said Philip, laughing. "All very well for you, girls; but you may as well recollect that this should be the beginning of all manner of sobrieties to me."

"Now, mamma, if you would only hear me speak," said Sophy, with a slight air of injury;—"but everybody is always asked before me, as if it was my fault that I am the youngest. I think we should have all the Briarfard people up here early—they could come with a procession and music, if they liked; and, if it was not very windy, the band could play upon the lawn; and then they might all come into the house, and have something to eat, and as much ale as everybody liked,—that is to say, not *too* much," said Sophy, correcting herself, "or it would be no pleasure; and cakes, and apples, and oranges for the children, and perhaps some little ribbons, or books, or things to give away. Then, when they were all merry, we could send them home; and I suppose there would have to be

somebody to dinner ; and then, after that, we could do what Margaret says, and dress up the hall, and as much tapestry and as many old-fashioned things as anybody cares for ; and musicians, and a proper great ball. Oh, mamma ! where is one to see such a thing, unless it is at home ?—and you that went to so many when you were young, and we that never see anything but Briarford and the Grange ;—Mamma ! don't you hear what I say ?”

“ If you've all finished,” said Mrs Vivian quietly, without any special response to this pathetic appeal, “ I'll tell you what I've fixed upon myself.”

A solemn silence ensued—an extremely brief one ; and after this full stop the authoritative tones resumed—

“ In the first place, we'll have a party to dinner—a larger party than we have ever had since you remember ;—and you can get pen and ink, Elizabeth, and put down the names. In the evening, we'll ask all the young people you know. I won't be so particular as usual, Sophy ; everybody that is at all presentable may come ; and any decoration that is reasonable I won't object to in the hall ; and you can dance as long as you like, or till your company are tired. Somebody can look up an almanac, and see if it will be moonlight for the guests going home. The twenty-fifth of November, Percy ; no one need forget the day. Of course,

Philip's guardian will stay a few days, and probably have some of his family with him ; and your uncle Blundell, and a few old friends, will do the same. You shall choose new dresses for yourselves, girls—the whole of you. Philip can give the Briarford children a feast next day, if he likes ; and nobody shall want a glass of ale. So now I've told you what I mean to do ; and if anybody has any improvement to make, I'll be very glad to hear it now."

" I wonder what's the use," said Sophy, half indignantly ; " I do wonder what's the use of asking people, when mamma has made up her mind all the while !"

" And I wonder, for my part," said Percy, " how, after all our valuable suggestions, my mother should hit on so commonplace a plan, which any one might have foreseen from the first ; and still more do I wonder how my mother can pretend to have consulted everybody, when yonder lies X, Y, Z, coiled in her corner, and not a word of wisdom required from her."

" Oh, Zaidee ? she would like something picturesque as much as I would," said Margaret.

And there immediately rose a chorus of calls—" Zed ! Zed !" from Philip, an impatient " Zay !" from Sophy, and the soft, quick " Zaidee, child !" distinct and authoritative, which came from the head of the house.

Zaidee's ears were as quick as a savage's,—buried in her book as she seemed, those delicate organs had caught the first breath of Percy's allusion, and perfectly apprehended all that followed. Now she put down her book very swiftly and silently, and coming forward, stole into her place, by the shaggy side of Sérmonicus — called Sermo “for short,” and famed as the wisest and gravest hound between the Mersey and the Dee. Sermo sat, very silent and deliberative, sweeping with his shaggy forelocks the footstool of his mistress; and between the ashy fawn colour of Sermo's profile, and the white marble of the mantelpiece, Zaidee interposed her kneeling person—long, lithe, and slender. The strange quick changes of attitude into which Zaidee threw this elastic figure of hers were the wonder of every observer; but in the mean time, she knelt by the fireside in perfect stillness — her dark hair, her plain, dark, girlish dress, and complexion not recovered from a summer's browning, standing out clear against the marble — while herself waited to be interrogated, and hear the cause of her summons, in breathless restrained impatience to return to her book.

“ Zaidee Vivian, laggard and last in all the alphabets,” said Percy, solemnly; “ your vote and advice are required in a family council. True, my mother's mind is made up already; nevertheless, the moment

of deliberation is not yet over, and now is your latest time."

" We are all about agreed, Zay," interposed Sophy. " We are to have a ball at night, and a dinner party. I don't mind that so much, considering what comes after—and we're all to have new dresses—so I don't see that there's anything to consult about now; for Percy's tent, you know, on the twenty-fifth of November, and on our lawn, the windiest hill in Cheshire! was quite impossible; and a feast next day to all the children, and the hall as fine as we can make it: I think mamma is the best planner, after all; and there's nothing more to say."

" Zaidee, you are to tell me what you think we should have on Philip's birthday, when he comes of age," said Mrs Vivian—" that's the question—never mind what Sophy says?"

" Philip's birthday? Oh, I know what I should like," cried Zaidee eagerly, twining her long fingers into Sermo's shaggy locks; " but it's no good trying, Aunt Vivian, not the least; I could not do it, you know."

" Couldn't do what, child?"

A great flush of violent colour overspread poor Zaidee's cheeks. The warm blood seemed to press, throbbing and swelling, under the thin and transparent texture which still owned the sunburning. " If

I could only make anything, or find anything—no, finding would not do—if I only *had* anything in the world that would please Philip on his birthday!"

Philip bent forward to hear the words so rapid and hurried in their delivery. "Zed! what a foolish child!" cried the heir, with a little moisture in his eyes. Mrs Vivian said nothing: she only put her little white hand on Zaidee's dark hair, to smooth down those locks which, to tell the truth, were seldom out of need of smoothing,—and stretching over Sermo for this purpose, rested her arm on Sermo's patriarchal and most reverend head.

"Oh, we'll all have our presents—no fear. Zaidee, you can make something too," said her cousin Margaret; "but now, mamma, if you don't object, we may as well have tea and lights, since I think we may just as well be doing something as losing time talking, when there is so much to do!"

The bell was rung — one strayed to the window, another to the library, a third to search for the pretty young lady "materials," which were only to be found in the young ladies' room; while Zaidee stole back to the volume which kept her place in her corner, pondering an impossible something to be achieved for Philip. Philip, with so many sisters, had so little need of anything of feminine manufacture; and to tell the truth, Zaidee's taste and ingenuity were still

very imperfectly developed. Philip, too, was heir and master of all—it would only be taking of his own to give to him ; and Zaidee had not a private possession belonging to herself in all the world, save a little quaint old gold chain, a sort of necklace, quite useless to Philip, which had once been her unknown foreign mother's ; and her father's Bible, an old worn volume, not at all adapted for a present. What could Zaidee do ?

## CHAPTER III.

## THE FAMILY.

THE Vivians of the Uplands were an ancient county family, well reputed, and of a stately, long ancestral line. At their culmination, some few hundred years ago, the family headquarters had been Castle Vivian, a great baronial residence in a richer district of the same county, and the Grange only a jointure house. Indistinct adumbrations of title were in the family annals, and their race had known many a gallant knight; but descended to the more modest standing-ground of rural squires, and denuded of much of their original possessions, age after age had taken from the pretensions of the masters of the Grange. One thing neither reduced grandeur nor impoverished means could take from them — the pride and glory of being indisputable heads of the house. True, it was a Sir Francis Vivian who now held sway in the great old castle of the race; but Mrs Vivian found no difficulty in pointing out to you the secondary and obscure branch from

which this rich cousin sprang—a “scion of the family”—whereas Philip Vivian, Esq. of the Grange, who might with all ease be the grandson of Sir Francis, was its distinct and indivisible head.

The late Squire Percy, in whose memory Mrs Vivian wore her widow’s cap, and for whom all the parish had wept when they carried him for the first time in silence, and with no kindly greetings, to Briarfard, belonged to the antique class of country gentlemen; innocent of literature, timid of enterprise, bucklered in impenetrable mail of warm human loves and hatreds, prejudices and kindnesses. In his day everything went on after the antique style in the limited domains of Briarfard; small farms, small fields, small profits, with little risk, and still less hope, filled the Squire’s contented life; his wife’s fortune and his own savings—no great item this last—lay snugly in “the bank,” which Squire Percy trusted next to the constitution. To embark this little capital upon new-fashioned implements, drainings or levellings; to sink these assured good monies of the realm in Cheshire clay, in the vain expectation of replacing with golden grain this damp and sodden grass, seemed little better than insanity to the Squire. He would make no such unhallowed venture. The soil produced what its Maker intended it to produce, said Squire Percy—rushy grass, rugged hedgerows, wonderful crops of flowering gorse

and heather, Cheshire cheese and butter, and a thin residuum of milk. Did modern agriculture, with all its pretensions to science, know better than ancient Providence, the sole superintendent for centuries of these wet levels of pasture ? And as no one tried to answer this overwhelming question, Squire Percy went on triumphantly upon his old-world way, and scouted improvements with all the proverbial warmth of the true John Bull and Englishman, which the unanimous county proclaimed him to be.

Squire Percy was his father's lawful successor, heir, and eldest son ; but the "ould Squire," a name spoken in the district with somewhat similar feelings to those which animate the world in general on pronouncing familiar abbreviations of another name to which is always affixed the same adjective, had been much disposed on various occasions, as rumour and family tradition went, to disinherit his most uncongenial and unbeloved heir. "Th' ould Squire" was still the familiar demon of the scared peasant imagination of Briarford, and many a child awoke with a cold shudder, or ran trembling along the lanes at night, in dread of the visionary enemy who bore this name. Stories of him were current everywhere, and—told on dreary nights when the winds were louder than their wont, and the trees were tossing wildly in the stormy moonlight round the exposed and out-standing Grange,

which every villager could see from his cottage door—there was something very eerie and ghostly in these tales, the more especially as they were not tales of ordinary licence or riot, the vulgar vices to which the vulgar mind is indulgent, but of fierce ungovernable passions, wild furious hates and frenzies, which awed and oppressed as much as they horrified the common understanding. Rage, that brought temporary madness upon the unhappy old man, who drove children and friends far from his fierce old age, and held the attendants, bribed by high wages to remain with him, in terror for their very lives, with pride so haughty, and resentment so bitter, that to oppose his capricious will in the slightest particular was like provoking a remorseless fate. How Squire Percy managed to succeed so peaceably to the ancestral lands at last, no one of his humble neighbours very well knew ; but everybody knew and rejoiced in the unspeakable ease and freedom of the new reign—and Squire Percy, who would have been popular anywhere, became doubly popular in the perpetual contrast instituted between himself and “th’ ould Squire.”

“Th’ ould Squire” had but one other son, a gay young scapegrace, who wandered from the Grange at nineteen and never returned more. People said he went abroad, and became a great traveller—that he even wrote books, and was in his day a famous man ;

but all that was certain of his history was, that he married a foreign lady and never came home. Some bits of wonderful embroidery in gold and silver and coloured silks were sometimes shown at the Grange, said to be sent home, pretty offerings of wistful kindness from young Frank's foreign wife ; but nobody knew anything of young Frank during his father's lifetime, nor until many years after Squire Percy's peaceful accession, when foreign letters came to the Grange, black-sealed and bordered, on receipt of which good Squire Percy mournfully went upon a journey, from which he returned, bringing home with him a very little, mournful, wistful, wondering child. Then it was told that Frank had died abroad ; that his poor broken-hearted wife had travelled to England to bring her child to her father's friends, but that not even Squire Percy's brotherly warmth and sympathy could keep the sad widow from sinking. She, too, was dead ; and the poor little maiden, who never cried and seldom spoke, but looked such a strange small monumental image of childish grief and solitude, was alone in the world.

This was Zaidee Vivian, now fourteen years old ; a quick-growing, strange, out-of-the-way girl, whom everybody wondered at. Nothing like her startling alertness of motion, her perfectly simple and unconscious abstraction of mind and manners, her quick,

keen, vivid perceptions, and those wild visionary moods which were still so entirely sincere and girlish—the unrestrained imagination which people called romantic—were known within the horizon of Briarfard. Her very name was a wonder ; no one had ever heard it before, and Zaidee herself was half-ashamed and half-proud of the outlandish syllables ; not much wonder that all the parish set her down as the oddest and least comprehensible of young ladies. Not a known relative in all the world had Zaidee out of the walls of the Grange. Her world and absolute boundary was this one family and their warm and kindly home. “Zaidee would never do to go among strangers—her heart is so tender, her feelings so keen,” says lively little Mrs Vivian, who has been so good to the desolate motherless child, whose loneliness touched her heart. But going among strangers is a horror and dismay which has never presented itself to the thoughts of Zaidee, who lives a very independent life much after her own pleasure, and has hitherto escaped many inflictions common to “properly educated” girls. Zaidee could not play you a bar of music for all Briarfard. Zaidee’s shy voice durst not hear itself singing save in the most obscure recesses of her own private retirement. If Zaidee is able to dance at all at this famous ball, over which Sophy grows wild, the instruction has been acquired involuntarily by the sheer exercise of

Sophy's superior strength ; and though Margaret can produce extraordinary landscapes, and Elizabeth has a natural taste for pretty groups of flowers, and paints them very well, Zaidee, armed with a school-room rule and cramping her fingers horribly, has never yet succeeded in making a tolerable straight line in the manuscript book where she sometimes copies her favourite bits of verse. Even the very handwriting of these extracts is no better than it should be—poor Zaidee cannot boast a single morsel of accomplishment. To run through a new book, every line of it, before a soberer reader has got over the preface—to have a general knowledge of every volume in the library, barring the facts contained in the same, and to be capable of any amount of reading however constant or long-continued—if these are tokens of intellectual aptitude, Zaidee Vivian has them all—but of ordinary education nothing more ; and such is the strange, fanciful, abstracted girl, who taxes her wild imagination with vain efforts to think of something which shall please Philip on his one-and-twentieth birthday.

## CHAPTER IV.

## ZAIDEE'S CHAMBER.

LIKE the nests of quaint little drawers in an old bureau, up steps and down steps, and piercing into all manner of odd corners, are the bed-chambers of the Grange. True, there are a few solemn great ones, in the most sheltered end of the house, but these are kept for company and solemn occasions, and it is through a thickly-populated quarter, intersected with multitudinous narrow passages and morsels of stair, and quaint out-of-the-way windows, that—if you have any right to go there—you must seek the chamber of Zaidee. Still more like the internal arrangements of a bureau, with concave roofs and glimmering oaken panels full of reflections from two or three cross lights, are these rooms in the interior—and not all the snowy draperies and pretty decorations, proper to the bower of young ladies, can make the apartments of even Elizabeth and Margaret like anything but the little hiding-places, cosy and shining, which they are. Sophy's room is a

miracle of good order and tidiness ; for Sophy is the most active and brisk little woman in the world, with the truest Saxon horror of litter ; but opening out of Sophy's room, a little elf-like cavern, with a small rounded window—a slender tall bed, extremely narrow and very long, a ghostly great old chair of faded velvet, richly embroidered, a single small shelf hung against the wall, a square of ancient fringed carpet spread upon the floor and leaving a polished margin, a strange dark eldritch old looking-glass with transverse lines in it, which seem to blink and twinkle upon you, merry-eyed, with the truest satisfaction in those grotesque distortions they make of everything reflected by them—is the special retirement, study, and sleeping-chamber of Zaidee Vivian.

The round window needs no curtains, for nothing but a bird on the wing could look in upon the maiden meditations of Zaidee in this far-away enclosure. Instead of pretty draperies, however, there shine between these thick stone mullions some fragments of old stained glass ; neither Zaidee nor any one else can interpret the mystic signs which fall in rich hues of red and purple upon the snowy coverlet and faded carpet when the sun shines into Zaidee's room ; nor could the wisest of antiquaries make much of these little patches of heraldry, features of griffins and plumes of party-coloured eagles unceremoniously wed-

ded together. And though the Vicar might be somewhat shocked to know a monogram of Mary, or a chipped and disfigured crucifix, among these remnants of the ancient art, such things do not disturb the mind of Zaidee Vivian. A hundred dreams of hers are woven about the vermillion and the azure of her panes of coloured glass, but the wild significations which the fanciful girl assigns to them are as far as entire ignorance can be from the meaning that they bear in fact—if fact or meaning have not evaporated from them many a year ago, as comprehension and intelligence have assuredly done.

Outside this turreted pinnacle is the stormiest spot in all the Grange ; and Zaidee, looking out through her uncoloured panes, has such a world of shifting clouds to watch and ponder as never dreaming girl possessed before. If there is little either beautiful or grand in the scenery about, as is very certain, it is wonderful the perpetual charm and interest of this great domain of sky. The wild freedom of so great a stretch of atmosphere, the tumultuous masses of vapour tossing upon that clear and luminous arch above, and the perpetual turmoil of the winds, give character to everything here. These very ribs of rock in Briarford Hill, the dark colour and solitary looks of the houses, each of them holding its garments about it, and standing firm, as if a sudden gust or a moment of incaution

might carry it away ; the gnarled, defiant, and resisting trees, with their foliage always blown towards a point, like travellers caught in a storm ; and those delicious harbours of shelter under high overhanging banks or in deep lanes, where you can hear the wind rushing overhead while not a blade of grass is stirred below,—all alike evidence the atmospheric influences prevailing in this corner of English soil. And no one unacquainted with them can tell the peculiar delight of this wild windy weather and exposed district, its flush of spirit, of resistance and exhilaration, or the interest of its ceaseless changes. Those fierce buffets of wind, those stormy flashes of rain, those glimmering vicissitudes of light and shadow passing over the whole breadth of country like some giant's breath upon a fairy mirror—if nature looks her homliest in this quarter, her struggling life and energy make amends ; and not the sweetest of landscapes could charm the wild imagination of Zaidee Vivian like this wind-swept level country—this great waste and wilderness of cloudy firmament, and the low-lying, fierce, and warlike hill.

The masonry of the Grange is wisely adapted to its climate ; and however wild the tumult without, Mrs Vivian has well ascertained that no fugitive draught can enter within to wither her home flowers, so that Zaidee's treasures are in perfect safety here, established

upon the low sill of the window, which forms a deep small round recess, and is lined with polished oak. These treasures are, first, the worn old Bible which once belonged to Zaidee's father—a homely well-used volume—written over in its fly-leaves with mysterious Greek characters, which Zaidee many a day dreams over and would give the world to understand ; and, in the second place, a small box bound with decayed gilding and once rich in ornament, which Zaidee calls a casket. It has been some kind of jewel-case in its day, and now it contains the sole valuable in Zaidee Vivian's repositories—the strange little gold chain, just long enough to circle her throat, which her aunt says she must soon begin to wear now, a mark of her maturing age and coming womanhood. Nothing else lies within this treasured and sacred casket—too honourable a place for common trinkets—nothing else except a book, or Zaidee's leaning arms as she bends over the same, ever shares with the casket and the Bible this polished window-sill ; but Zaidee, with a whole day's work and a bit of an ancient hanging, has manufactured for herself a cushion, which lies upon the floor immediately under the window, and on which it is her use and wont to lie in all her stolen readings, half kneeling, half reclining, with her book upon the window-ledge.

It is here the morning light finds Zaidee Vivian

kneeling in her simple girlish prayers, all unwitting of the red mark of the cross, broken and indistinct, which the early sunshine throws on her brow. There is no cross, emblem of agony, of struggle and hope, and might that cannot die, in all the line of Zaidee's life, or the prospect of her fortune. Humble enough these fortunes may come to be by-and-by, but, warm in the heart of so loving a household, the orphan knows no fear. Yet strangely it falls upon her young forehead morning and evening; strangely it reddens over her in the light of noon, and wanes into pearly colour with the twilight. The sign of salvation—yes—the type of love invincible, and sacrifice divine—but no less the badge of all human self-denials and agonies, the mark of suffering and sorrow upon a mortal brow.

This is Zaidee's room—where there is not a curve or corner, not a line of panel, or a fold of curtain, which is not peopled with Zaidee's fancies. However much of her may go down stairs into the family occupations or apartments, Zaidee's heart stays in this quaint little solitude—it is the scene of her visionary life.

## C H A P T E R V.

## ZAIIDEE'S FRIENDS.

PERHAPS the dearest intimate of Zaidee's life is Sermo, Squire Percy's favourite hound. Sermo has known more than one name in his day, and had no better an appellation in his youth than any other of his sporting race, a common huntsman and no more. But growing age, which gave to Sermo his wise and reverend face, conferred upon him a more becoming name. "Ne'er was such a dog, Squire.—I say 'tis as good as a sermon any day but to look at him," said Squire Percy's groom to his master. Squire Percy was a pleasant man, and loved a jest, so he carried this saying to his household circle, where Elizabeth, Margaret, and Philip were half-grown youngsters, and little Percy an 'imp of a boy. It was not quite certain which of this merry youthful party was the godfather or godmother of Sermonicus, but it was an established fact that, in the dignified flow of these longer syllables, the common name of Rover was lost from that day ; and a double favourite hence-

forward was the patriarch of the kennel, whom all his youthful friends were calling all day long to acquaint him with his change of name. When the Squire died, a kindlier affection still came to poor Sermo ; the drawing-room, where his very entry was an unwarranted and guilty intrusion of old, became free soil to the faithful retainer of the father dead. His mistress's very footstool pillowed Sermo's sententious face, and nobody could find anything in those grave decorous manners of his to call for exclusion, after the softening sentiment of grief had given him admittance. The days of mourning for Squire Percy were over, and the household heart had sprung again into the returning lightsomeness of nature and youth, but the drawing-room was still free to Sermonicus, and still he sat with stately gravity by the side of his mistress, or looked up with his vigilant and serious eye from his rest by her footstool, holding in the very sanctuary of household authority an unreproved and dignified place.

But of all his friends none were so close and loving as Zaidee, whose affection for her good uncle seemed all to have flowed in as an increase to the private tenderness which all her life she had cherished towards Sermo. Sermo's stately pace of sobriety alone had ever been known to tempt Zaidee into quiet regularity of walking. Sermo stalked by Zaidee's side, through

hall and passage, and faced the blast with her, unwilling but resigned, sniffing it resentfully with his disdainful nostril when Zaidee would go forth into a dusky twilight for the sole pleasure of feeling in her face the wild familiar wind. Sermo sat upright by Zaidee's side when she brought an ancient volume from the library, fixing upon it thoughtfully his wise unwinking eyes ; but Sermo was a dog of discretion, and disliked the damp odour of new printing and uncut pages. When his young friend possessed herself of the contents of the library-box, which came at long periodical intervals from very London, to the admiration of all the country round, Sermo, with dignified contempt, withdrew himself to Mrs Vivian's footstool. So trifling a study as that of modern literature was beneath the attention of the solemn faculties of Sermonicus—it was almost the only occupation which Zaidee pursued alone.

The stout, common, everyday affection, which is your strongest texture for constant wear, the house-love which is not critical, nor thinks it has any call to criticise, which neither doubts the tenderness of others nor its own, was the common family bond of this little company of kindred. Gratitude and helplessness gave it a greater delicacy with Zaidee than with any of the others ; but the girl was so warmly cherished, and so thoroughly received among them, that she scarcely did

know in reality how much ground for gratitude she had. A most admiring and devoted younger sister to Philip, whom she thought the very type of manliness, and full of the tenderest enthusiasm for Elizabeth in her stately beauty and majestic simpleness, of respect for Margaret in her pensive moods, Zaidee loved Sophy very dearly too, and was provoked with reasonable good-humour by Percy's pranks, as sisters are wont to be by wicked brothers. They were her own, every one of them ; yet nobody in the Grange was Zaidee's chosen and confidential friend.

It was very hard, indeed, to find any properly qualified candidate for this office. It was much the easiest plan to fill it with some imaginary Blanche or Gertrude, pale, graceful, refined, and sympathetic. Yet Zaidee kept her eyes open, prompt to discover any proper living representative of her ideal friend. It was an astonishing mental faculty in its way, Zaidee's power of observation. From under the covert of her book, and with a mind really occupied with that in the first instance, not a scrap of anything important or interesting in the conversation then in progress escaped Zaidee. She read with all her might too, but she could not close up all the other channels of information—could not dull her quick senses, or deaden her natural aptitude ; and a very wonderful thing it was to Sophy to find how little of the news of the

household needed to be repeated to one who was never seen listening on its first discussion. "I am quite sure, if I cared about a book, I should never hear a word any one said," was the wondering remark of Sophy; "and I am sure I would never waste my time over a book I did not care about; yet Zay knows what she reads, and knows what we are saying at the same moment. I can't tell how she does it, for my part; *I* can only do one thing at a time!"

But, notwithstanding the wonder of Sophy, Zaidee continued to read and to hear, and, still more strange, to see, simultaneously. There was a tolerable amount of visitors at the Grange, considering its lonely situation. Behind the hill, towards the richer side of the country, were various families of sufficient note to be on familiar terms with the Vivians. Nobody much noticed Zaidee in her corner. Zaidee read on undisturbed—unconsciously noticing everybody; but there was not a Gertrude nor a Blanche among all these Cheshire young ladies, nor a chance of one, so far as Zaidee could perceive.

About this time it happened that the Curate of Briarford married a wife—an event which, humble as the individuals were, was by no means uninteresting to the ladies of the Grange. The reverend vicaress was fat and scant of breath—scarcely to be calculated

upon for the simplest tea-drinking, and very much afraid of the steep road to the Grange ; and Mr Green, first acknowledged to be a very good young man, having turned out of late an extremely sensible one, universal consent declared his wife a person to be paid some attention to, and received on a neighbourly footing, if that were possible. Everybody, but Zaidee, whose opinion no one thought of asking, was dismayed to find Mr Green's wife turn out a very tall, very young lady, in fair ringlets and white muslin, lately out of the school-room, very pensive and sentimental ; an eager borrower of novels, a fluent quoter of poetry, and most keen in the discussion of all the fabulous histories, and all the romantic personages she could hear of, far or near. Mrs Vivian could not win her to that urgent oversight of the parish old women, which the lady of the manor thought necessary ; and Sophy could not tempt the languishing young heroine to plead for holidays and indulgences, or to join in secret projects for the delight and astonishment of Briarford school. Mrs Green did not happen to chime in harmoniously with the peculiar tone of Margaret, the only one of the family of tastes similar to her own ; so Mrs Green was very generally given up in the Grange, with only the reservation in her favour that there surely must be something good in her, or her sensible husband would never have made such a choice ;

“but men,” said Mrs Vivian, sententiously—“men, it must be confessed, where women are concerned, are often such fools !”

To the general astonishment, however, when everybody else relinquished her, Zaidee adopted Mrs Green. Mrs Green’s name was Angelina—the most unfortunate of designations. Her poor good husband, who was only John, threw all the blame of all her weaknesses on this celestial name, and would have called her Sarah with good will ; but not so Zaidee Vivian. Then, Mrs Green took the warmest interest in all romantic and imaginary persons, and could “say” any amount of verses ; the said verses having so much effect, at least upon the reciter, as to bring moisture to her pale blue eyes. With these conspiring circumstances to recommend her, Zaidee received into her special favour the Curate’s wife ; and though she had yet poured out but few of her own private musings into the willing ear of her confidante, and found an unaccountable difficulty in doing this, yet still her confidante, chosen and elected, Angelina was. Her being married was a drawback, certainly, and a still more annoying suspicion of her being silly had just darted across Zaidee’s mind ; but Zaidee had an infinite deal of glamour in her girlish eyes, and could so easily exalt and idealise—it was the age of “sweetness in the bud and glory in the flower” to Zaidee, and who

was to profit by the "vision splendid" if it was not her selected friend?

Perhaps neither of the individuals would have felt particularly flattered by their close conjunction; yet it was nevertheless true that Sermo and Angelina, with an attendant retinue of select old women from amongst Aunt Vivian's beadroll—old women who could tell stories—were Zaidee's most beloved friends.

## CHAPTER VI.

## ELIZABETH.

“ PHILIP does not know what Colonel Morton is to do here—for some days—as my mother tells us ; neither do I, Lizzy ;—it must be something about you.”

“ Indeed, Percy, my mother has said nothing to me,” said the soft liquid voice of Elizabeth.

“ And the Captain ?—does he say nothing ?” inquired Percy, with a little impatience.

“ Nothing, Percy.” A soft tranquil blush coloured Elizabeth’s face : she was not discomposed in the slightest degree, but the pure blood came to her cheek in maidenly acknowledgment of her affianced bridegroom’s name.

“ I would not let them treat me like a child, Lizzy, if I were you !”

“ I can trust them,” said the sweet answering voice, in such tones as subdued the boyish impatience of Percy. The youth turned away with a youth’s affectionate enthusiasm, and a youth’s quick but no less

affectionate anger. “My beautiful sister!” muttered Percy, “not one of them knows how good she is,—and we’ll all put our hands to it to throw *Lizzy* away!”

You would have thought the familiar abbreviation sacrilege had you seen the queen-like figure so simple and yet so majestic, which, leaving the young brother in the little paved fore-court, which lay between the house and the moat, was now re-entering the open doorway of the Grange; for few who looked upon her lofty beauty could realise the character of Elizabeth Vivian, so full of sweet unconscious humility and child-like simpleness. This perfect unpretending and even unintellectual simplicity of hers, made her, by some strange magic, half sublime. Straightforward, and sincere, and innocent, Elizabeth made no investigations into the unknown, but stood on the clear ground of things obvious and actual, and on the daylight level of ordinary soberness and truth. She was not clever; perhaps this very fact helped her to the half adoration with which her brothers regarded her—but foolish she could never be.

Elizabeth read nothing but the Bible, which she loved to read, and sundry good books, which she did not love, but thought it right to study. This was the whole extent of her attainments in literature, unless the household receipt-book, or the young-lady volumes of patterns for “fancy” work, could be numbered among

the miscellanies of literature. Two or three little feminine accomplishments she was exquisite in. She painted flowers with the sweetest natural grace and simplicity, arranged them with faultless taste, and did everything well which could be done with a needle. Besides these, there was no one fulfilled all the every-day household offices with so perfect a natural propriety. Elizabeth thought nothing beneath her, and dignified everything with that wonderful queenly grace of hers which everybody was aware of but herself. Herself was aware of it with the slightest possible shade of annoyance. She laughed her low musical laugh, while she complained of being so tall, so solemn, so incapable of those light half-invisible movements by which her lively little mother kept all the household on the alert; but perhaps nothing did more contribute to the perfectly supreme and undisputed tenderness with which all the house regarded Elizabeth—respectful, yet protecting—as the contrast between her perfect simplicity of humble mind and manners, and her imperial person—it gave her every action a singular charm.

The guardian whom Squire Percy had associated with their mother in the charge of the family interests, was an old friend of the house, an invalided Indian officer, rich and of good repute. Colonel Morton had a son only a few years older than Elizabeth Vivian, no great match, as everybody said, but a very suitable one.

Bernard was clever, while Elizabeth was not,—but for the rest, all the advantage was on the lady's side ; and Elizabeth's home admirers could not comprehend what she, so beautiful as they all thought her, could find attractive in the very plain dark man, mustached and sun-browned, whom their guardian presented to them, after many years' absence, as "my son," and all the retainers of the Morton family proudly hailed as Captain Bernard. True, he turned out a very agreeable man—well read, well bred, well informed. At first sight, these did not seem the qualities to secure the heart of Elizabeth ;—yet, whatever his means of wooing were, a successful wooer Captain Bernard Morton proved to be.

"She who might have made the greatest match of any young lady in the county ; she who only needed to be seen !" cried the indignant Mrs Blundell, Elizabeth's aunt. Elizabeth smiled and blushed and shook her head, but made no other answer. If anything did ever dismay the composed and tranquil spirit of Elizabeth Vivian, it was this "being seen." Admiration ruffled her calm, unless it was household admiration, which she liked well enough, setting it all down to the score of love and kindness ; but to be seen ! to be looked at like a picture or a statue !—almost Elizabeth was angry ; and with a sweeter content she turned to the dark face of Bernard Morton, to the

unassuming lot she had chosen, and the womanly life of home.

At the same time it was just possible that there might be a little truth at the bottom of Percy's boyish impatience and jealousy for his sister. She who made no exactions, perhaps, did not fare quite so well as if she had been more self-asserting. It was just possible that her betrothed and his father calculated a little too much upon the easy acquiescence of Elizabeth. A slight cloud of pain crossed her forehead. "I should be sorry to think Bernard could feel so," was the thought that passed through her mind ;—"and I to say I can trust them, and yet doubt like this!" So Elizabeth set down the momentary pang as a fault of her own—much the most satisfactory plan for getting rid of it—a plan which she constantly adopted—and came down to breakfast, after half an hour's retirement, with her most tranquil looks and most composed heart.

But Elizabeth was doomed to some agitation that morning. On the breakfast-table lay a letter from Bernard, urgently begging for the appointment of their marriage-day. This had been often postponed already, and the bridegroom was impatient. Why not have it when Philip came of age? Why not take advantage of one joyful opportunity to make another? Surely they had known each other sufficiently long to obviate all scruples ; why not yield this point to him ?—and

Captain Bernard urged his long affection, his impatient patience, his general profound submission to her wishes in all matters hitherto. "I did not know, really, I had had my own way so often," said Elizabeth, puzzled, but undoubting, as by-and-by she discussed this matter with her mother. "It must be one time or another, my love," was Mrs Vivian's response; "and I don't see what good it is putting off the day;—you had better give way!"

So Elizabeth, with her usual gentleness, dropped the discussion. She did give way as was her wont; and it became known in the household that Philip's coming of age and Elizabeth's marriage should take place within the same eventful week. A whole lifetime of excitement and festivity, as Sophy thought, crowded within the little range of one seven days.

## CHAPTER VII.

PERCY.

WE have left him pacing up and down in the fore-court of the Grange—much inclined to be rebellious and impatient, though scarcely quite certain what he is chafed about. It is moderately calm this morning out of doors ;—a dim, cloudy day—what the villagers call “fresh” at Briarford, which means that the atmosphere has a great deal of rain in it, and at the smallest provocation would throw a heavy handful right in the face of the passer-by. At present, only a fresh chill drop comes now and then in the sweep of the wind ; and the bare trees are visible below, with many a bend and deprecating courtesy, propitiating the favour of this well-known and familiar gale. Against the cold sky—though there is in reality no sky to be seen, but only a pale black tumult of confused clouds relieved against a horizon, only a little paler and more luminous than themselves—the little tower of Briarford church rises from among its mound of graves. And

yonder are the clustered roofs of the village, the tops of stacks and gables, of barns, and low-lying cottages sending up faint curls of blue smoke, and faint sounds of life awaking into the misty heavens. Beyond these, a long extent of pasture-fields, where some few patient cows graze meekly and with discomfort, and the far-away snarl of the sea, curling white over the sand-banks, and receding with its heavy leaden tint behind into the cloudy sky ;—this is all the prospect, and it is not the most comforting or cheerful prospect in the world, even when one knows that the bright breakfast-table and warmer atmosphere of the Grange lie so close behind.

Percy has not grown to his full height yet, and will not be gigantic even when he has done so ; his hair rises with a sort of crested fulness from that brow of his, where so many lines and puckers are visible already—lines of vivid expression, and quick mobile, changing thoughtfulness, where no pain is, but only life and energy, vivacious and young. All the lines of Percy's face are quick, variable, wavering lines, trembling full of incipient sunshine and laughter, yet never entirely free of shadow, as of a suspended cloud. No one can quite prophesy what sudden revolution is to come next upon those bright young features, where the flying emotion comes and goes, as the light and shadow passes upon the face of this broad country round. At

present, the expression is only extremely impatient, somewhat fretful and annoyed ; though, to tell the truth, Percy's reasons for annoyance are something of a doubtful character. He would be puzzled himself to explain them. This only Percy knows—that Elizabeth, his beautiful sister, is extremely likely to be married by-and-by, and quite sure to yield to the arrangements made for her, and to submit to the time imposed, whatever her own inclinations may be. Percy does not pause to consider, that the active part in such negotiations does, after all, belong to the bridegroom ; that Elizabeth Vivian would remain Elizabeth Vivian to the end of time, before *she* would step forward and say what day she would be married. In fact, Percy does not take the trouble to consider anything, but only resents for his sister, very hotly and warmly ; and says again, he would not let them make a child of him, if he were she—for it does not occur to Percy what an extreme impossibility that is ; nor how unlike to his irritable impetuous self—the genius and wildest spirit of the family—is his sister Elizabeth, in her queenly submission and womanliness, whom no one could humiliate, humble as she always is.

There is no covering on Percy's head, where the wild locks begin to toss about in the wind as he quickens the pace of his musings. This boy, who begins to be a man, is nineteen only, and has the world

before him ;—the world before him !—and he spurns it with his young triumphant foot, this subject-globe, made to be conquered. As he hurries to and fro upon this platform of his, the old warm family home behind, and the level country spreading broad before, something mighty and great, called in the vocabulary of fancy, Fate, Fortune, and the World, lies under the dreamer’s eyes. His pace quickens, and this mass of matted hair shakes out its love-locks on the breeze. Ah, a very different thing from the everydays which will make life to Percy, as to all other mortal creatures, is the wild bright prospect on which Percy Vivian looks abroad. Neither map nor description could convey to any other mind the faintest idea of this which appears to him. There are no panoramas made of that celestial country ;—the view is too aerial and too dazzling for any landscape-painter. Every one for himself, and not another, has a chance to look once into the charmed and glimmering vista ; and Percy gazes, with his brilliant eyes, into the heart of this enchantment now.

Oh and alas for all those grand futures which may be !—what halting, worn-out decrepid things they come forth at the other end of this magnificent arch of fancy !—poor, plethoric fortunes of money, instead of the glorious, generous, canonised Fortune of Hope ; daily burdens, hard, and petty, and odious,

instead of the noble martyrdoms and heroisms which were in our dreams ; but, as for Percy Vivian, to-day is only the present to-day of boyhood and youth to him—youth, and boyhood, and education, all tending onward—and no succession of mornings and evenings, but a great Ocean of the Future ; the World, a giant Goliah, and not a thronging army of little ills and little men, spreads full before the dazzled vision of the boy about to set out upon his life.

The family estates—an imposing title—represent no such very imposing income ; and though authorities say that the modern agriculture which Squire Percy despised may make Squire Philip a very much richer man than his father, this increase has all to be realised. In any case, it is a certain fact that the heir will have quite a small enough income to maintain his rank as head of the family ; a rank of which the youngest member of it, Sophy herself, is fully more tenacious than Philip. So Percy must make his own fortune, and the youth is extremely well disposed to do this, and would be indignant at the very idea of remaining ignobly at home—has been even heard, indeed, felicitating himself on his second sonship, and exulting over his elder brother, who has no better chance all his life than that of being a country squire, whereas it is impossible to predict what extraordinary chances lie before Percy. This is so far well ; but it is much

easier to decide that Percy shall make his fortune, than to decide the means by which it shall be made—and many a family council, many an “advice” from Colonel Morton and from Uncle Blundell, have gone to the decision. Percy himself, if rather hard to please when a suggestion is made, still remains somewhat indifferent ; he says he does not care what his profession is, but it turns out that he does care enough to pronounce a most unhesitating negative on various proposals made to him. One, however, which has the advantage of being opposed at once by Uncle Blundell and Colonel Morton, fixes Percy’s wandering fancy. Disposed to it from the first, he is bound to it for ever, as soon as he discovers that both the advisers in question unite in disliking the idea. So Percy will be a lawyer—a barrister—a student of the Temple—and never wavers again in his choice.

Perhaps the charm of the desultory, ungoverned young man’s life of which he reads—that life in chambers, enlightened by all that is witty, gay, and free, where household trammels are not, nor ordinary restraints, but only the high honour and truth, that gospel of manliness which is preached by sundry leaders of the youthful mind of these days—has fully more influence upon Percy than that quite different aspect of his chosen life, which discloses future Lord Chancellors and Justices burning the midnight oil in

the dim recesses of the Temple. However that may be, Percy Vivian scorns an over-distinctness in his dreams—he neither determines on reading very hard, nor determines on idling; and if visions of the lighter pursuits, the delights of getting into print, or the graver boy's enthusiasm for authorship, ever come to Percy, he keeps them in their sunny mist, and does not bring down the fairy visitants to tangible shape or form: only Percy's heart dances, and his cheek glows, when he thinks of his “prospects,” and with eagerness he looks to the time approaching when his journey of life is fated to begin.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## THE YOUNG LADIES' ROOM.

A BRIGHT fire burns in the fairy grate of the young ladies' room : everything is bright in this little favoured bower, for none of these young ladies are at all elevated above the pretty things loved by their class and kind. There are wax-flowers on the mantelpiece, the joint production of the three sisters ; there are two or three painted groups of Elizabeth's favourite lilies and roses upon the wall ; more than one landscape of Margaret's, extremely lofty in intent, but just a little obscure in execution, hangs on the same line ; and if Sophy can do nothing with the pencil, Sophy has at least a glowing screen of most elaborate needlework lifting its gilded wand like a gold stick in waiting in the corner, and reaching nearly as high as the pictures. The little couch which Margaret, half reclining, fills with her slender well-formed person and her work-basket, bright with all the delicate colours of floss silk and Berlin wool—the pretty arm-chair, in which Eliza-

beth sits erect by the table—the low footstool, sacred to Sophy, are all alike gay with the handiwork of the sisters, and rich with embroidered flowers. And the firelight winks and brightens in the ivory keys of the open piano, and the mirror reflects this pleasant group in a ruddy atmosphere of home. The smallness, the fancifulness, the glow and plenitude of simple ornament, are all quite suitable to the character of the apartment. By-and-by, it is very true, all these will be sober family mothers, at home in nurseries and housekeepers' rooms. At present they are only young ladies ; it is their time of budding and holiday ; and only a hard heart would grudge to them these natural embellishments of their youth.

Nor are their occupations more substantial than their surroundings ; they are all very busy, that is one thing—and this graceful industry looks very becoming, one must confess, however trifling the product may be ; for, alas, it is only “fancy-work”—only the pretty nick-nacks of young-ladyism—and perhaps those young ladies would all be much better employed in reading, or studying, or otherwise improving their minds. But one thing is certain—neither geology, nor botany, nor any lighter dilettanti science, made easy for the use of young ladies, could permit that sweet silent thoughtfulness of which Elizabeth's face is full, or the flow of happy talk which runs out of

Sophy's lips, and comes in briefer responses from Margaret — not very profound or wise, but very pleasant, as is their occupation and the scene.

For Elizabeth, whose fingers are accomplished in these womanly arts, is free to give her tranquil mind to other matters while she labours ; and Margaret, who has done a great deal of similar work, and is pretty well assured and confident in doing this, has her spirit quite at ease in it ; and Sophy, who does not aim at absolute perfection, but tries nothing which she cannot achieve, is perfectly unembarrassed in *her* business ; — whereas poor Zaidee, toiling hard after a glorious unachievable idea, with eager haste, with pricked fingers, with heart and soul too much absorbed for speech, could not say a word in answer to all this running talk of theirs, if that very word would insure success to this enterprise of her own.

A careless attitude in this moment of inspiration would not become Zaidee. It is well enough for Sophy yonder, with her little commonplace piece of embroidery, to sit so lightly on her footstool — very well for grown-up Margaret to recline ; but Zaidee, whose ambition projects something which nobody has accomplished before, and whose vexed fingers and perplexed scissors labour hard on the heels of her ambition,—for Zaidee it is a very different matter : so Zaidee, who always stoops, sits erect at the table for once in her

life ; Zaidee, said to be the greatest idler in the Grange, labours with such a strain and intensity as no one else is capable of, and now growing pale, and now flushing into sudden excitement, holds her breath, and neither hears nor answers, with, alas, always this ideal luring her on,—but the silk and the needle, the scissors and the fingers so sadly incapable, and the great creation making so very little progress after all.

And everything that is being made by the little company, and other pretty things besides, more than you could look over in one good hour, are making for Philip's birthday. Love-tokens for Philip himself, hosts of them, young man and scoffer as he is ; and such pretty combinations of white and gold, and white and silver, and white with every possible enlightenment of delicate colour, for Elizabeth, already known in the household in the magical character of bride.

“ Well, I have many a time thought of Philip's birthday,” said Sophy after a pause, and the slightest possible touch of sentiment was in Sophy's sunny face, “ but I never thought what changes it would make at home. I used to think Philip would be a little more master perhaps—not that mamma would change—but only of course we are all growing older, and Philip would be a man and not a boy ; but only to think what a strange difference there will be ! Elizabeth too ! Of course I knew Elizabeth was to be married

some time—but oh ! I am sure, Margaret, it will feel so very strange ! ”

“ Elizabeth will come back, and we shall go to see her, Sophy,” was the answer ; “ but Percy—to think of Percy going too !—and one cannot tell when *he* may come again.”

“ Well, Percy is glad to go,” said Sophy with spirit ; “ and Elizabeth, though she won’t say she’s glad, never makes any resistance, but yields to Captain Bernard without caring for us. I daresay it may be very fine, after all, going out into the world ; for my part, I would rather stay at the Grange.”

A very little toss of Sophy’s pretty head, a very little pique in her half-defiant half-disconsolate tone, goes far to make you sceptical of the entire truthfulness of Sophy. Margaret answers with a sigh.

“ None of us know much of the world,—even I, though I am so much older than Percy and you—even Elizabeth, who is oldest of all. If our family had been what it used to be, we should all have seen a great deal more : but whatever you may think, Sophy, I am sure it is a great deal better for us. Oh ! I have no doubt at all, a real true heart must grow so weary of the world.”

“ But I don’t quite see that either,” responded Sophy promptly. “ The world ! I should think, for

my part, the old women in the village must be a great deal more weary of it than I. I am sure it has been twenty times harder for them than even for mamma who is as old—and I am more weary than Lady Stanley's pretty niece, who has been presented, and spends all her time among the great people, and is never done with gaieties. Well, I know you say you despise all that, but I am quite certain I don't ; and speaking of that, Margaret, do you know I could not sleep all last night for thinking of our ball."

"How silly !" said the pensive Margaret ; "what were you thinking ?"

"First of all, how I should have my dress made," said Sophy eagerly ; "and I fell upon such a pretty fashion just before I went to sleep. To be sure this marriage of Elizabeth *is* very distracting ; for a marriage is always even a greater thing than a party, however great that may be. Well, and then I began to wonder who would dance with who, and whether Mr Powis would come, and how jealous he would be if he saw any one else with you—of course it would not be proper for him to dance—a clergyman ! though, if you won't be angry, I do think he cares very little about the church ; and then, somehow, when I really saw the hall, and everybody so gay, there suddenly flashed across it Elizabeth's marriage, and Mr Powis ran in to the vicar, and the hall became the church,

and we were all in white and in sunshine instead of the lamplight, and—I—I believe, I fell asleep."

"How you do talk, Sophy," said Margaret, with a frown and a blush.

"Elizabeth does not say a word—I suppose, because she has so much to think of," persevered Sophy ; "and Zay—I do wonder what extraordinary thing Zay is making, and who it is for. Do you know, Margaret, I was thinking how this will change us all. Philip will be his own master—a real grown-up man ; Elizabeth will be Mrs Bernard Morton, a married lady ; you will be Miss Vivian, and the eldest of us all. Percy will be far from home and seeing the world ; me—it won't make so much difference for me—but still there will be a change when Percy goes. Only Zay will not feel it at all. She was always the youngest, the pet, and spoiled—it will make no difference with Zaidee."

Zaidee heard, but did not look up, being in the crisis and agony of her invention—and Sophy ran on to another subject. Simple Sophy ! unforeseeing little mortal company, which could tell nothing of the unknown ! for not one there could so much as guess or dream that Zaidee's share of all these changes should, far as the extraordinary overpasses the common, exceed and overpass their own.

## CHAPTER IX.

## A COUNTRY PARTY.

“YES, Captain Bernard Morton is a very fine young man, I assure you,—though of course a great beauty like Elizabeth—everybody expected something different for her. I was quite disappointed myself—I took such pains to give her proper ideas ; but she is so simple—a perfect child—though everybody thinks her quite a princess from her looks. However, a proper ambition—nay, indeed, a proper estimate of herself—one might as well try to teach yon odd little Zaidee as lecture *her*.”

“Hush, lady dear,” said the Vicaress, who could not entirely forget she had once been an Irishwoman, “that is Mr Powis standing close by your other hand.”

“Very well ; you don’t suppose I mind Mr Powis,” said Mrs Blundell, the managing and match-making aunt, wife of Mrs Vivian’s only brother, a childless matron and most anxious superintendent of her young relatives. “I see he is handsome, and I hear

he is of good family. Margaret is a plain girl beside Elizabeth. I don't quarrel with *her* taste ; but this family is so destitute of ordinary prudence—even my sister. I don't believe, now, that till things came so far that it would be impossible to break off—I really do not believe any one but myself or Mr Blundell would ever think of inquiring what that young man's prospects were."

"He is a pretty lad," said the Vicaress, musingly. Good woman, she remembered the far-away kindly youth which had been her own ; and thinking of Miss Margaret, whose pensiveness she was extremely respectful of, she could not but feel this the more immediate consideration after all.

"Oh, Mrs Wyburgh, a person of your experience must perceive," cried Mrs Blundell, "how, situated as I am with all these dear young people looking up to me, and myself so interested in them all—if they were my own, I could not be more concerned for them—my mind is quite tortured with anxiety, knowing, as I do, how really ignorant of all the ways of the world they are. My sister is not a romantic person—quite the reverse. Mrs Vivian is really a practical, sensible woman ; but she is so engaged with household matters and common things, and gives so little attention to the settlement of those dear girls—the first object, in my view, that a mother should attend to—that

really I am kept quite on the rack, and could be always at the Grange if I had my will, out of pure anxiety for them all."

"I am certain sure it is very kind of you," said the good Vicaress, who, in addition to her Irish birth, had been long a curate's wife in Wales, and had odd turns of phraseology, and not the most polished style in the world ; "but they're all so easy and pleasant at home ; and, to tell truth, I'd not be grateful to any one that schemed the pretty things away,"

"But that is an improper view—an imperfect and limited view," said Mrs Blundell eagerly. "They must marry, you know ; and they must marry so as to keep up their standing in the world. In my opinion there can be nothing more important. I assure you it gives me many an anxious thought."

"No doubt, no doubt," said good Mrs Wyburgh, who, notwithstanding, looked considerably doubtful ; "but the world grows wiser, I think, every year ; there was nothing said like that in my young day"—and with a sigh and a smile, "my young day," merry and Irish and poor, presented itself to the thoughts of Mrs Wyburgh. "Richard had not such a thing as a prospect when we married," continued the Cheshire Vicaress, brightening in memory of their old struggling times ; "and all my mother gave me was God bless you—yet sure we're here !"

“Ah, my dear good friend, but how much better for you if your family had been more careful,” said the match-maker, shaking her head.

Mrs Wyburgh also shook her head. Her face, now tolerably full and ample, had once been pretty ; and there was fun and spirit—a little corruscation—flashing now through the easy content and acquiescence of her usual mood.

“And you never had a family of your own,” continued Mrs Blundell ; “you never knew what it was to have a mother’s cares ; it makes the greatest difference—a woman unaccustomed to the charge of children can have no idea how a mother feels.”

Mrs Wyburgh’s countenance fell. “No, I had no babies,” said the good woman, with humility and a sigh. “I used to have them in my dreams, darlin’ angels ! I’ve thought sometimes God would give me these same little cherubs if I came to heaven. Bless you, I’d know them every one—all the sweet little faces that used to come whispering about me in the lone days when Richard was away ; but I never had one child, true and sure. No, I confess to it—it was God’s will.”

And the homely womanly heart pursuing this sore want and void, left Mrs Blundell and her busy schemes far behind, nor ever remembered to wonder what right Mrs Blundell, as childless as herself, had to address her

so. Mrs Blundell, on her part, was slightly disconcerted—a worldly spirit is always so extremely at a loss to understand a simple one ;—and not as young ladies and gentlemen to be settled in the world, but as babies, dear little hearts, adored and yearned for all her life long, could good Mrs Wyburgh alone contemplate the children who had cost Mrs Blundell so much care.

“I’ve had them committed to me from India—from every distance in the civilised world, I do believe,” said the latter lady ; “schools to look for, growing boys to attend to, young ladies to bring out ;—we have so many friends abroad ; and I am sure many a mother has less experience than I.”

But the Vicaress of Briarford had said her say, and relapsed into acquiescence once more.

And Margaret, with a slight changeful colour brightening her face, with a certain new life and beauty of expression awakening her downcast eyes, looking sweeter, purer, humbler, more womanly than it is her wont to look, stands in another corner discussing various matters with some of her young lady-companions, and playing with prints and papers which lie on a little table at her hand. The very rippling motion with which that white pretty hand trembles over them, the faint pit-pat of the foot peeping from below her dress, the wavering inconstant smile which comes and goes over all her face, betray her secret. She is so

innocently conscious that some one is looking at her ; so aware in her very heart of the glances and movements of that “ some one,” upon whom she never fully lifts her own eyes. Mr Powis is a handsome young man, as Aunt Blundell says ; tall, with a little bend and swing in his well-formed person ; a sort of half-pleased, half-deprecating consciousness that he is handsome ; and a face which has nothing objectionable in it, unless it be the want of something to object to—all is so regular, so well proportioned, so perfectly in balance ; a very handsome young man—do you not wonder whether he is worth all this true and genuine feeling which lies in Margaret Vivian’s face ?

At all events, nothing can exceed his eagerness to catch Margaret Vivian’s eye and win her favour. Mr Powis is the incumbent of a neighbouring parish, the cadet of an old, very old, antediluvian family of Wales, with magnificent things in expectation, but only a little rectory and a very modest income in present enjoyment. Mrs Wyburgh, of Briarford, thinks it would be a very pretty match, and quite equal, for Margaret’s little portion could be comfortably balanced against the young incumbent’s small but competent income, without any superiority on either side ; while Mrs Blundell, on her side, wonders a little what Mr Powis’s “ motives ” may be, and cannot fail to acknowledge him disinterested with his fine person and clerical ad-

vantages, though she would fain ascertain with greater accuracy what these much-spoken-of expectations are. However, the matter is by no means so far advanced as that ; and Aunt Blundell comforts herself in having abundant time for investigation before this shy and conscious liking can come the length of an engagement, and accordingly turns with an easy conscience to the agreeable bustle of Elizabeth's preparations, and is content.

“ Yes, Percy is going too—my eldest daughter and my youngest son,” says Mrs Vivian to the little group of neighbours who surround her ; “ and now I suppose I have nothing to look for but one flight after another till all my birds are gone.”

“ Yes, we pride ourselves in our children, and they all leave us,” said a grave lady sitting by. “ I had eleven, and I was so proud of them—such a flock ; but I live by myself now, and they only come to see me. Oh, it is a very different thing living at home with one's children, and having them come to see you—you'll find that by-and-by.”

“ I always dread the first marriage,” said a brisker personage. “ Oh the flutter my girls were in when my Mary went away ! and as for settling again, or letting one get peace and quiet, you might as well think of snow in June. A bride, you know—everybody talks so of a bride, and all the fuss and the dresses and the

excitement—the issue was, every one of them was married before the second year.”

“Dreadful!” said a young wife emphatically; she had just been working out her fingers, and lightening her white and gold purse, which was still in its first gloss, in behalf of a second sister following in her own immediate train.

“Well, Percy is not to be married at least—Percy only leaves home,” said one of the gentlemen of the party; “not such a fascinating thing that his brother should seek to follow *him*.”

“His brother is the eldest, the head of the house,” interposed Mrs Vivian, with proud humility. “Philip, of course, will not leave the Grange.”

“*Only* leaves home; how these men do speak!” cried the wife and liege lady of the masculine interlocutor. “Poor boy! to think of all the temptations, and all the discomforts—that laundress, that Mrs Fiery-face, and the boy that polishes Pendennis’s boots—that is all they have in place of the services of home; and then the temptations, Mrs Vivian! Poor boy, how can you trust him in London?”

“Temptations are everywhere,” says Mr Wyburgh, with professional gravity; and shaking his head half disconsolately, half in a consolatory and comforting strain, bids Mrs Vivian take courage.

“I will, because I must,” said the lively little lady of

the Grange. "Percy must go. It would not be right to keep him at home. I pray God bring my boy safe through all the dangers ; and as for the discomforts, he must submit to them. Oh, I hope Percy will take no harm."

It was worth while to see the erect imperious dignity into which Percy elevated himself, hearing a far-off *sough* of these concluding words, "Take no harm!" as if the young hero, setting out to subdue the world, were nothing better than a child.

"I have been thinking of some sweet poetry. Oh, Zaidee ! I remember so well where I saw it first," whispers in a corner the Curate's wife, whom nobody contests Zaidee's possession of. "Listen, I am not afraid to say it to you—

' 'Tis vain to seek the gayest crowd,  
Though all be glad and all be fair ;  
Music is sweet, and mirth is loud,  
But happiness—it is not there.

But come to the sequestered dell,  
Oh seek the pensive shade with me ;  
For there alone she loves to dwell,  
Far, far from mirth and revelry.'"

Only thus far had Angelina proceeded, when Zaidee put up her hand and said, "Don't."

"Don't!" Mrs Green paused in silent horror.

"Because some of them look quite happy," said Zaidee. "Oh, I wonder what Margaret is thinking of. Hush, pray, and don't be angry. I can't tell whether I am happy or not ; but I like to look at them all."

## CHAPTER X.

## FAMILY HISTORY.

“ YES, you may say there were not many people like your grandfather. I never met with one,” said Mrs Vivian. “ Sit down, Percy, and I will tell you when I saw him first.”

Percy sat down in prompt obedience ; the drawing-room lay in a bright warm twilight, glowing with the great ruddy fire which filled the whole fire-place, a mass of red, touched all over with little points of quivering lambent flame. Another side-gleam of kindred warmth came glimmering from the open door of the young ladies’ room. The heavy antique window in the front of the house glittered between its mullions with a ruddy twinkle, which took their chill from the very clouds peering in without ; and the long sashes at the other end of the apartment, draped to their feet in crimson curtains, gave back no unkindly light to cool the tone of the warm atmosphere within. Full in the light sat Mrs Vivian in her great arm-chair, sitting very erect,

as was her wont, and making the most of her inches. Close beside her, in his gravest dignity, his long shaggy nose relieved against her black gown, sitting up like his mistress, with the conscious erectness of one who sets a good example, Sermonicus held his privileged place, and Zaidee once more, silent and intent, knelt between Sermo and the mantelpiece. The other members of the family were grouped much after their usual fashion—Philip in the great chair—Margaret very musing and meditative, her pretty hands crossed upon her knee, her foot patting the carpet, her downcast eyes gazing into the fire, her thoughts astray—Elizabeth by the table, where she has just laid down her work, because it is no longer possible to see—Sophy half seated, half leaning upon the arm of Philip's chair—and Percy thrown into a sudden seat slightly withdrawn behind, and only waiting “to hear my mother” before he seeks his own occupation. Mrs Vivian likes a fireside audience, and has quite composed herself for a family talk.

“The first time I saw your grandfather I was quite a young girl myself,” said the lady of the Grange, “not quite twenty, newly married, and a little afraid, as you may fancy, of the Squire, whom every one was afraid of. I had been at school out of Cheshire most of my younger days, and when I came home the old gentleman was abroad, so it came about that I never saw him till I was married. We came home here to the Grange

after our marriage jaunt : we did not call it a tour in those days, and we had only been to London. You may fancy how I felt, so young, coming to face that dreadful old man. I was afraid to dress too simply, lest he should think me a dowdy ; and afraid to be too fine, lest I should get condemned for a fool. Well, descend I did at last to this very drawing-room, and there sat the Squire, as suave and bland !—it was dusk and firelight, something like what it is now. Dear me, Philip, don't look up so ! I do believe you have a look of that dreadful Grandfather Vivian, after all."

Everybody looked to Philip ; and Philip, turning uneasily in his chair, laughed, and put Sophy away from him. "I suppose, mother, in the particular of blandness and suavity," said the heir,—"I have heard nothing else in my grandfather resembling me."

"He sat there in that very seat," said the old lady, slightly shrugging her shoulders with a half shudder at the recollection, "so polite ! but with such a fierce fiery glow in his red grey eyes ! His politeness was quite terrible. I don't think I ever was so frightened in my life ; for it was so easy to see there was not a morsel of real kindness, and all the while that tiger glaring in his eyes ! My poor Percy, your dear good father, who never feared any man, and never had cause —he was always so true and guileless himself—was quite hushed and silent before the old Squire ; for

Percy had so good a heart, he could not bear even in his thoughts to be disrespectful to his father, so he always took care that his father should have no cause to expose himself in his presence—that is, so far as any man *could* take care—and people said there was nothing that kept the Squire down so much as just that respectfulness of Percy's. However, all that evening I sat trembling—I was so awkward—I spilt my wine at dinner—I scalded my hand when I made tea—and, I can tell you, I was thankful when next morning we came away."

"Did you only stay one night, mamma? did you never see him again?" asked Sophy.

"I saw him many times again, but I never came back to the Grange in the Squire's lifetime," said Mrs Vivian; "and for years after he was dead, I dared no more sit here in the firelight than I dared fly. I always thought I saw him sitting in the great chair, smiling with his lips, but with that cruel glare always in his eyes. I was young, and I suppose I was fanciful. I never got that look out of my mind."

All the audience were as young and fanciful now as their mother had been; and even Margaret, roused from her musings, cast a half-scared glance into the crimson gloom of the curtains, and looked with a thrill of awe round the darkening room.

"Poor Frank had run away just a little time before

—poor Frank ! everybody remembered him so well,” said Mrs Vivian with a little sigh.

Zaidee’s kneeling, half-visible figure, started into fuller light, with a faint rustle, and everybody else starting at the sound, was so glad to be certain it was only Zaidee. Mrs Vivian resumed.

“ Such a bright high-spirited boy!—I always thought Percy would resemble Frank ; but, poor fellow, so tender-hearted and sensitive—he could not bear the life he led, so what could he do but run away ? He might have written to us, to be sure, but he was as good as a foreigner by that time, and married to a foreign wife—poor Frank ! and he did write Percy such a letter just before he died.”

“ But, Aunt Vivian, you never saw my mother ? ” said Zaidee, in a very low tone. Zaidee has said these same words a hundred times before.

“ No, poor child, I never saw her. She was so young, Percy said—so pretty, and strange, and broken-hearted, with that little chain of yours, Zaidee, on her neck, and your poor father’s Bible always in her hand. I looked every day for Percy bringing her home, and he knew I would take it to heart so, that he never wrote me of her death. I never knew, Zaidee, till I saw your uncle leading you into the Grange, all by yourself, poor little orphan, and then I thought I should have fainted. I had so set my mind on comforting poor Frank’s widow.

Don't cry, child, I'm sure you can't remember your poor mother."

And Zaidee swallowed her tears very hastily and in silence, not acknowledging that this want of recollection was her very saddest grief ; yet Zaidee had a visionary remembrance, half imagination, half memory, of this poor young mother, which she cherished in her inmost heart.

"There was a very strange thing said just before the Squire's death," resumed Mrs Vivian : "I don't think I ever told you ; though he was furious at Frank for running away—for the Squire had a certain regard for appearances after all—yet he had either grown more furious at Percy afterwards, or else relented towards Frank. The land was never entailed, you know, and it was confidently said that the Squire had made a will, disinheriting your father, and leaving everything to his youngest son. His lawyer had told somebody, and as no one could calculate what the Squire might do, it was very generally believed. Of course it made us very anxious, for our family then was increasing every year ; and though Percy cheered me as well as he could, saying he was a young strong man, and would so gladly work for us all—bless him, so he would, I knew that—Percy himself believed it. However, when the old man died, though Percy and the lawyer searched everywhere—for the Squire's

papers were scattered over all the house, in the most unlikely places—no such thing was to be found—not a will at all—and everything came to your father in the natural course. I never expected it, I am sure ; but so it was."

"He never made the will, then ?— or had he repented ?" said Philip, with much interest.

"Nay, he *had* made the will ; the lawyer said so," was the answer, "leaving the Grange, the lands, everything, to his son Frank. I suppose he must have got into a rage with Frank again, and burnt it. It was very well for us he did not give all away to some stranger or to some charity ; and I can't tell you how thankful I was when no will was to be found."

"Oh, mother ! if one should turn up now !" cried Sophy.

"Your father took care to look everywhere ; your father was too anxious about you all to miss any corner," said Mrs Vivian. "No, no, it is twenty years since,—no fear now. But I think that will do for to-night, children ; ring for tea, Philip. Elizabeth, lift that work from the table ; there never is room for the tray. And if any one likes to get the book and give me my sewing, I think we might finish that story, and get through a great deal of work to-night."

## CHAPTER XI.

## PHILOSOPHY.

“If it had been so, Zay—if it had only been as they thought,” said Sophy next morning,—“what a strange difference!—why, you would have been an heiress, and we nothing but your cousins. Should you have liked, Zay?”

“Of course, only to give it to Philip,” said Zaidee, quietly. “I think I should have liked to give the Grange to Philip on his birthday; that would be something worth while.”

“To give to Philip! But Philip could never have taken it; you know that.”

“Why not, Sophy?”

“Why not?—how simple you are,” said the better instructed cousin. “Of course no one could take such a gift as that, unless it was from a king or some very great person, who had plenty to give. No, no, I would rather have had Philip working hard to make his own fortune than taking the Grange, if it had been left to

you ; but not to speak of that, Zay, how would you like to be an heiress, all for yourself ? ”

“ I would not,” said Zaidee, with sudden animation ; “ a woman *should* be poor.”

Now Sophy could by no means see the justice of this proposition. She shook her head.

“ *Should* be poor ! —that is all your romance and nonsense. I cannot see why, for my part,” said Sophy, “ for I am quite sure women make as good a use of money as men.”

“ One would never know,” said Zaidee, “ whether it was oneself people cared about ; and particularly, if you were neither handsome, nor clever, nor amiable, but still would like some one to care for you in spite of all ; and then to doubt that it was not you, but what you had—Oh, Sophy ! you would not be an heiress.”

“ I could not be an heiress, with so many brothers and sisters,” said Sophy, pouting a little ; “ and I am sure I don’t think, besides that, that I am quite so disagreeable as you say.”

“ I should not like, even,” said Zaidee with great simplicity, going on with her own thoughts, “ to be beautiful, like Elizabeth—because I should always think people liked me for being beautiful, and not for just being *me*.”

“ Upon my word ! and if you were neither pretty,

nor amiable, nor good—neither like Elizabeth, nor an heiress—nor anything,” exclaimed Sophy, “what good would it do any one to like you because you were *you*?”

Zaidee could not very well answer this question ; it was her turn now to be puzzled and shake her head. “I cannot tell,” said Zaidee, under her breath ; “it would do no one any good,—but that would be *love*.”

“Love is not a proper thing to talk about,” said Sophy, drawing herself up in womanly state.

The blood rushed over Zaidee’s face in deep girlish shame. “I do not mean what you mean,” said Zaidee ; “it is not love like—like Elizabeth ; but why is my Aunt Vivian so good to me, and Philip, and all of you ? Sophy, why have you been so kind to me all my life ?”

“Kind !—no such thing,” cried Sophy, indignantly, a little moisture creeping to the corners of her eyes at this appeal ; “one never thinks of being kind to one’s own family,—that is quite a different thing ; why, you are *our* Zaidee—such an odd, stupid, spoiled little girl—that’s all !”

Zaidee was long silent, pulling the grave ears of Sermo, and something like a tear startled the paw of the favourite hound, falling heavily on its repose.

“It is not called so in books,” said Zaidee, softly, at last ; “everybody there *is* accomplished, and hand-

some, and amiable, and good ; it is always for something that people like them,—but I think this is proper love for all that ; not because I am worth much, or pleasant, or pretty, but because I am just Zaidee—me—that is why my aunt is always so kind, why all the rest care for me,—and that is better than anything else in the world !”

“I daresay Sermo thinks so. It is no matter how you are dressed, or how you look, or anything, Sermo always chooses you,” said Sophy, laughing ; “but now, you see I am not so heroical. I should like very well to be an heiress, and I should like still better—hush, Zaidee, you need not tell any one—to be beautiful. I could bear to be *more* beautiful than Elizabeth, I think. I do believe I could. There’s something in Shakespeare,—oh, to be sure, Anne Bullen, and she would not be a queen, not for all the world.”

“But I never said it was not very good to be rich and pretty, too—in a way,” said Zaidee ; “only not for one’s own self.”

“‘She would not be a queen, that would she not,  
For all the frogs in Egypt,’ ”

said Sophy. “I wish I had a fairy godmother, like Cinderella. I would not refuse to be as pretty as she liked, if she asked me.”

Some one just then emerged out of the open window of the drawing-room, and came through the sheltered

garden-path to where the girls held their sitting ; and Zaidee, looking up, condemned herself as irreverent, for thinking that no better representative of the wished-for fairy godmother could be found, than in this small, delicate, vivacious personage, advancing towards them. Mrs Vivian wore a large apron with pockets over her thick dim black silk gown, and had a shadowy shawl, white, soft, and lace-like, a sort of cloud embodied in fine Shetland wool, and delicate knitting, over her cap,—for Mrs Vivian was full of prudent cares on the score of taking cold. Mrs Vivian's full and ample skirts were not so long as to hinder you from defining clearly the black velvet slipper, soft-paced, yet with a very creditable thickness of under leather, and a most distinct and unmistakable high heel, which kept Mrs Vivian's foot in warmth and comfort, and added an inch to her stature. The soft, white, floating drapery and fringes of the shawl fluttered over her shoulders, and a handsomer little old lady than the mistress of the Grange never buckled neat belt round trim and slender waist—so light of foot and alert of motion,—the prettiest fairy godmother that ever oppressed maiden was fortunate enough to see.

“ Dear me, girls, when will you learn to be prudent ? ” said Mrs Vivian ; “ not a branch but drips with this wintry dew, and you linger here as if it was summer.

I shall have you both laid up with cold before Philip's birthday."

The idea made Sophy pale. "I don't believe there is a single dewy branch in the garden, mamma, but that one that has brushed against your shawl," said Sophy; "and we were just coming in."

"I want some one to carry a message to the vicarage. Will you go, Zaidee?" said Mrs Vivian; "for every one is busy, and I have something ready for Sophy, which must be done immediately. Mrs Wyburgh will like to see you—Zaidee, will you go?"

"I may take Sermo, Aunt Vivian?" asked Zaidee, eagerly. The little lady nodded, and Sermo, though he, good fellow, had no bonnet to put on, stalked after the flying footsteps of his companion through hall and staircase and winding passage, to the very inner recess of Zaidee's room. A few minutes more and they emerged, walking together as near hand and hand as their different modes of locomotion would allow—Sermo's long shaggy ear held lightly in Zaidee's fingers—with great gravity and thoughtfulness, occasionally, but very seldom, indulging in the ordinary exchanges of conversation—for the most part in friendly silence pursuing their own thoughts.

Just descending the hill where the breeze was sharpest, and where the trees did actually flirt a drop or two of pendent moisture upon Sermo's averted head,

and against the cheek of Zaidee, there was a decided chill of winter in the air ; but the low-lying paths under the hill were warm in the sunshine,—dry and sandy, and glittering with minute crystals, as sandy paths do glitter in the sun. Zaidee, who neither looked before nor behind, went on steadily, full of thought, wondering about that old Squire, wistfully thinking of the father and mother gone, turning over her own girlish philosophy, or roaming at large over her general discursive field of imagination and thought. What Sermo's mind was busy with did not appear ; but as he, too, had been present on the previous evening, and heard Aunt Vivian's recollections, there was at least a possibility in his favour that he pondered these family stories too. However that might be, the pair of friends went on in friendly harmony, respecting each other's silence, and not interrupting each other's thoughts.

## C H A P T E R XII.

## THE VICARESS.

THE vicarage stands beside the church in the single street of Briarfard. Briarfard is by no means a model village ; sundry barns turn their long blank sides to its causeway, walls of old solid mason-work, supplemented with brick patches ; and in sight of the Vicar's drawing-room itself is a grey gable, with a wisp of straw projected from the round eyelit hole, high in its wall, and hay littered on the pavement below. The vicarage, too, stands close upon the street, with only the smallest strip of garden, almost filled with a trim holly hedge, separating it from the common thoroughfare, though in itself it is almost picturesque in its antique homeliness, and dates farther back than the very church. It is a one-sided house, looking askance upon the village, and turning the respectful aspect of its full front towards the ecclesiastical establishment of Briarfard—the low venerable square-towered church which stands high upon a grassy mound of graves.

Rich old velvety far-descended grass, full of little nests of daisies, and minute hollows which the sun searches into with such a wealth and warmth of glow, covers the sloping bank before the side windows of the vicarage ; but the Vicar's wife, for the sake of the “stir” without—to call these languid rural echoes stir !—and the greater cheerfulness, prefers to sit in the little parlour facing the front in the long afternoons when the Vicar is from home.

This parlour is a cosy little parlour, full of soft seats, and easy footstools, and a homely luxury—nothing that misbecomes in the smallest degree the modest and suitable gravity of the country clergyman, who is neither wealthy nor of great expectations, but a plenitude and abundance of simple comforts adapted to the age and to the habits of the simple couple who have attained to their own utmost range of ambition, and look for nothing higher in this life. Mrs Wyburgh, round and soft, with rosy fingers which it is pleasant to touch, and a cheek that has not lost its bloom, sits in a very comfortable chair, with everything she is likely to want on a table within reach of her hand, near enough the fire to enjoy its kindly warmth, and near enough the window to have the full benefit of what passes without. Mrs Wyburgh has some knitting in her hands—pleasant work which is in no hurry ; and there is a book on the little table;

a good many books range modestly within the glass-cases there in the recess on either side of the fire ; and it is impossible to look upon a picture of kindly ease and comfort more pleasant or more loveable than the afternoon composure of the Vicaress.

Few people admire Mrs Wyburgh's taste in dress. Strange odd greens and drabs, neither dark nor light, but checking and striping one another in old large patterns, which always look faded, are Mrs Wyburgh's delight. Her great dinner-dress even, that silk brocade which the maid-servants at the vicarage hold in awe, and everybody in the parish knows so well, has its groups of dim green flowers upon a drab ground. These half colours are very unsuitable to Mrs Wyburgh ; but as she sits there—her blue eyes twinkling with a little fun and a great deal of good humour, her cheek with its soft pleasant bloom, her irresistible comfort—it becomes impossible to find fault even with her dress.

And thus it is that Zaidee finds the Vicaress of Briarford ; only, by the time of Zaidee's arrival, Mrs Wyburgh has begun to sip the fragrant cup of coffee with which she relieves her solitary afternoon ; for these good people, who are guiltless of pretension, keep to the early hours of their poverty, and dine at two o'clock. It is only three now, and there has been no dinner yet at the Grange ; but Zaidee is by no

means reluctant to partake of Mrs Wyburgh's refreshment, nor of the cake which stands in a delicate china plate, close by her hand.

Very pretty, very thin and transparent, is the little cup and saucer, and the coffee is neither *café noir* nor *café au lait*, but aboriginal coffee, sweetened, softened, and mollified with a spoonful of rich Cheshire cream. The cake too is unexceptionable; and neither Zaidee nor Sermo, exalted as are the ideas of the one, and irreproachable the gravity of the other, are above Mrs Wyburgh's cake.

When this agreeable little episode is over, Mrs Wyburgh rises and goes upstairs to seek a pretty dressing-gown, made for her by the young ladies of the Grange. There is some work upon it which Margaret wants to copy for Elizabeth, and this is Zaidee's errand. Coming down with it immediately, the Vicaress seats herself to wrap it up, in her easy leisurely way. "It is a very pretty pattern," Mrs Wyburgh says, "and so kind of the young ladies to do it for her."

"But you don't work much at the like of this, Zaidee, dear?" said the kindly Vicaress.

"No," said Zaidee. Zaidee's wits were wandering after something else, so she gave the briefest answer to the question.

"But I would, darlin', if I was you," said Mrs Wyburgh. Words of endearment fell so softly and so

simply from this good woman's lips—she said "honey" even sometimes, and the word, with its faintest cadence of brogue and its mellow kindness, was fragrant and sweet in her mouth.

"Would you, Mrs Wyburgh?—but everybody can do it at home," said Zaidee, blushing secretly at the thought of those impossible triumphs of needlework which she herself tried to achieve, but could not. "And why would you, if you were I?"

"I'd be young then, my dear," said the kind Vicaress, with a momentary evasion. "Ay, darlin', more than that—never a one knows, Zaidee, what they may come to."

"Come to? I cannot tell what you mean," said Zaidee with wonder.

"Blessings on them that have kept you so ignorant!" said the Vicaress fervently. "But this world's a hard world, Zaidee. Many a one sleeps soft and wakes light in their young days, that have a hard fight before their end. If I was you, honey, as young, and plenty of time, I'd learn every pretty thing I could turn my hand to—that's what I'd do."

"But why, Mrs Wyburgh? Oh, if you would tell me why!" cried Zaidee, eagerly, the colour brightening upon her face.

"Dear heart, not a one knows—there's nothing but change," said Mrs Wyburgh evasively. "Ay,

darlin', sure but I've seen many a pretty young lady that had good need of all the skill in her ten fingers. I never had that learning myself—not a thing could I do but plain shirts and suchlike, or a gown for myself ; but if I had life to begin again, I'd learn all I could learn, Zaidee—everything—playing music, and making pictures, and all those beautiful flowers that your cousin paints so natural, and a pretty hand of write—everything, dear—that's what I'd do if I was young like you."

The colour went and came upon Zaidee's face ; her eyes grew troubled, wistful, and a tear came to their long lashes. "Mrs Wyburgh," said Zaidee anxiously, "do you know anything that is going to happen ?—anything Aunt Vivian does not know ?"

"I?—no, honey, not I," cried the Vicarress. "Do you think I'd tease you, and you so young ? But I'm old, Zaidee dear ; I've come and gone in my day into the world, as far as London and Dublin, not to say Swansea ; and, darlin', I've learned experience. It's only a word of advice I'm giving you. No, indeed ; sure nothing's going to happen but good and happiness to you and yours. But such a great girl you're growing—and clever, please heaven ; and all sorts of learning about the house. I'd learn, Zaidee—I'd learn to do everything, if I was you."

Zaidee said nothing, but only drew Sermo's long ears

through her fingers with a haste and unconscious earnestness which Sermo did not quite approve. The Vicaress was disturbed—she had not intended her good-natured words to have so much effect.

“It’s not angry you are, darlin’, with an old friend?” said kind Mrs Wyburgh.

“Angry with you!” Zaidee sprang up with one of her sudden bounds. “I am glad you have told me, Mrs Wyburgh. I ought to begin, I know. If anything should happen at home, I would be of no use at all to any one ; but then I don’t think anything will happen. Aunt Vivian says my uncle looked through every corner, and there was no such thing to be found ; but, for all that, I will think of what you say—I will indeed—and I know you are very kind. Good-by, Mrs Wyburgh—Aunt Vivian will look for me home.”

“Good-by, Zaidee dear: but I don’t know, any more than the babe unborn, what the child means about looking in every corner,” said the Vicaress, as Zaidee hastened away. “Oh the innocence ! she never thinks what might happen to herself if the young Squire married,—as he will, please Providence,—and all these sisters on the old lady’s hands—bless them all ! It’s little like the Lord’s common ways if He forgets how they’ve lent to him many a day, and blessed this orphan, and succoured them that were nigh to death. But I’m

glad I said it, if the child will but take thought to what I say."

Take thought of what Mrs Wyburgh said, Zaidee certainly did—puzzled, earnest, intent thought ; of which, however, little practical result came, except sundry other glorious impracticable designs in the shape of needlework, and fruitless floating resolves to learn a hundred accomplishments before the winter was over. But Zaidee had another visit to make before she left Briarford ; she could not pass the very threshold of her romantic and confidential friend.

## CHAPTER XIII.

## ANGELINA.

A VERY different scene, and a very different person, awaited the young visitor in her next call. The Curate's little house was a new house, with some pretensions to be a cottage—a very small red brick erection, with porch and outer shutters painted green, and two little bits of turf and flower-plot on either side of the three feet of gravel path which led from the small green wicket to the narrow door. Little new-planted rose-trees, looking very raw and recent—small spots of crude shrubbery—morsels of unaccustomed flowers—the very turf itself lately laid down, and by no means taking kindly to its prim square—made anything but a pleasant contrast to those old old prickly holly hedges, those immemorial yews at the vicarage, and the close velvet of its sunny lawn, which had scarcely been touched except by the mower for fifty years. Mrs Green had boxes of straggling seedy mignonette on her window-sills, and other little devices natural to a town-

bred taste, which here, where she might have any extent of garden, but could by no means increase the natural proportions of her casements, were not the pleasant things they might have been. The door opened into a very strait passage, and the passage led to a little parlour very much dissimilar to Mrs Wyburgh's. Very conspicuous here were the differing tastes of the two persons who had so strangely attempted to make themselves one, as John Green and Angelina his wife. The homely substantial pieces of furniture which the bachelor Curate had accumulated, were overlaid and encumbered with the nick-nacks of his bride; and very uncomfortable and awkward—as much so as the Curate himself, when Angelina was in her height of sentiment—appeared the good Curate's chairs and tables in their unsuitable embellishments. That little brassy shining grate full of cut paper and elaborate pink roses—if one only dared to make the ornaments useful for once in their life, and might light the fire with them!—a fire was so much wanted at once for the physical and moral atmosphere of this poor, little, gay, unsuitable room.

The Curate's wife sat upon her small sofa with a book in her hand. Poor Angelina! she looked very chill and out of ease in a muslin gown, with long ribbons streaming from the waist. Her faint complexion had a tinge of blue in it, her fair ringlets

drooped sadly over her shrinking shoulders, and her muslin drapery hung about her tall timid person in thin and chilly folds. The blind was half-way down, the curtains hung half across the little window, and sadly against the lower panes tapped the straggling stalks of mignonette, with their great seed-pods and meagre tips of flowers. Poor Curate, if he came home for comfort from a round of wearisome visitings ! Poor Angelina, who had no comfort to give ! Even the abstract and preoccupied Zaidee acknowledged a shiver, though she did not quite know whence it came.

“ I have not seen a creature all day, though Mr Green said perhaps some one would call,” said the Curate’s wife; “ and I got ready so early, because you know Mr Green likes me to be polite to the parishioners ; but, indeed, Zaidee, I am very glad it is you.”

Zaidee looked round disconsolately. There was something wanting here—very sorely wanting—but she could not make out what it was.

“ Isn’t this a dark room ? ” said wistful Zaidee, “ It is quite a bright day out of doors ; but it looks so dim here.”

“ Do you think so ? ” Mrs Green vaguely feels the discomfort too. “ For myself, I love that half light—that is why I have green curtains ; and you could fancy, you know, Zaidee, that the light came down through the leaves in a wood.”

“But there are no leaves in the wood now,” said Zaidee, shivering a little; “for winter is coming on. I am sure to-day is very cold.”

Still bluer looked Angelina in her clinging muslin; but Angelina would not confess to so commonplace an ill.

“I had forgot all about heat and cold when you came, Zaidee,” said Mrs Green. “Oh, it is so delightful in this obscure place to lose oneself in literature. I am sure you think so as well as me.”

But Zaidee, who was extremely simple and downright in spite of her romance, could not get up a rapture on the moment, and, besides, was still very much occupied with what Mrs Wyburgh had said.

“I am sure I cannot tell just now,” said Zaidee; “I was thinking of something else. Do you ever do any work when you sit here all day alone?”

A sudden blush coloured the faintly tinted cheeks of Zaidee’s sentimental friend. She drew herself up a little, and looked somewhat offended. Zaidee, who meant no evil, could by no means discover why.

“Perhaps I don’t cultivate my fingers so much as many ladies I know,” said Angelina with dignity, “but I always find so much to occupy me in my mind.”

“Yes,” said Zaidee thoughtfully, pursuing the current of her own meditations; “and then you will always have Mr Green to take care of *you*. But I

wonder what use I could be, always reading, reading, if anything should happen. I wish I was clever at working ! I wish I could do something ! But you used to be at school — will you tell me what they taught there ? ”

“ They taught a great many foolish things,” said Mrs Green ; “ embroidery and needle-work, and I can’t tell what besides, when it might have been so much better to give the young ladies a taste for literature, and learn them to find resources in themselves.”

“ Resources !—ah, that is just what I want,” said Zaidee with sudden animation. “ Suppose anything should happen — and Mrs Wyburgh says no one can tell—oh, what could I do ? I don’t believe I should be of any use at all — not the least in the world ; but I wish you would tell me—I think you must know. People who are not clever are obliged to work sometimes. Now, what can they do ? ”

“ I don’t understand you, I am sure,” said Mrs Green ; and certainly it was not quite easy to understand Zaidee. “ Servants are not very clever generally, nor common labouring people. I am sure the woman I have here—she’s enough to break any one’s heart ! ”

“ But I could not be a servant,” said Zaidee quickly. “ I think that would be impossible, unless we were very poor indeed. What else can people do ? ”

“ I am sure, Zaidee, I can’t in the least tell what

you mean," said the Curate's wife, becoming half frightened and greatly perplexed. "I have known poor ladies who did sewing—plain sewing—but that was very hard. Most ladies who are obliged to work, go out for governesses, or keep schools, or something like that."

Zaidee sighed. "I am fourteen, but I could not do anything," said poor Zaidee, half to herself; and Zaidee's puzzled and disconsolate perplexity was at once amusing and sad.

"I had a friend at school. Her name was Charlotte Disbrowe," said Mrs Green. "She had a great many little brothers and sisters, and, poor girl, she was to be governess to them all when she got home. They were very genteel people, but I am afraid they were poor, and Charlotte had to learn everything for the sake of the rest. Such quantities of work she did, poor girl, and was so glad when one of the young ladies would read to her. I did it often; but since I have been married," said the Curate's wife, drawing herself up a little, "I heard she was to be married too; and just the other day I got a letter—she knew Mr Green was a clergyman—begging me to find some one who would do for a nursery governess. Any good girl, Charlotte says, that could read and write well, would do, and her mamma would be very kind to her, though she could only give her a very little salary. But you may fancy,

Zaidee—a governess out of Briarford!—where could such a thing be found? Though, of course, they think I am sure to know, being a clergyman's wife."

Entirely passing over this little bit of dignity, Zaidee gravely shook her head, as she applied to the matter in hand. "I don't think there's any one like that in Briarford," said Zaidee; "Dr Ellis's sister was a governess; but she taught all sorts of things, and was quite a great lady. No, indeed, I don't know any one. Only to read and write? Most people can read and write. But I am very much afraid *I* can't even write well."

"You ought to have a governess yourself, Zaidee, or masters to teach you, as we had at school," said Mrs Green. "Indeed, I am sure they have always neglected you at the Grange."

"What do you say?" Zaidee opened her astonished eyes. "You are very wrong if you think so," continued Zaidee, drawing herself up in her turn, "and every one else in Briarford knows better. That is not what I mean. I was always afraid of masters and governesses; and I am stupid too, I suppose, and so I don't know anything, though I am grown up, and fourteen years old. I think I will begin to work this very day."

"If you chose, I will read with you, Zaidee, and do all I can to help you," said Angelina graciously.

But Zaidee, who knew she could read a volume while her friend got through a chapter, demurred to this.

“For it is not reading. Percy and boys read ; that is all the education they are fit for,” said Zaidee, with a thoughtful look. “But girls can learn a great many other things. Yes, and girls are of use when boys can’t be. I am sure I do not know what I could do ; but something or other I must try.” So saying, Zaidee called to the willing Sermonicus, and set off, with many meditations on her way home.

## CHAPTER XIV.

## FURTHER CONSULTATIONS.

“SOPHY, have you ever thought any more of what Aunt Vivian said?—that story about the will?”

“About the will? No; why should I?” said Sophy, looking up with astonishment; “it was nothing to us, and it is so long ago.”

“But I think it might be a great deal to us,” said Zaidee, solemnly, “if, after all, something should turn up, leaving all the Grange away from Philip; and if Grandfather Vivian was such a man, no one knows what he might do. My aunt said so; I know I have been thinking of it all day.”

“Did you think of being the heiress, Zay, instead of Philip?” said Sophy quickly.

“No, indeed. I thought if some stranger turned out to be the heir, what should we all do? All of you are good for something, Sophy,” said Zaidee disconsolately; “but for me, if anything should happen, I would be of no use at all. I could wait upon you,

that is true ; but, Sophy, do you know, though I am fourteen, there is nothing that I can do ? ”

“ Why, you are only a child ; what should you do ? ” said Sophy. “ I wonder what put this into your head at all.”

“ Mrs Wyburgh. She meant nothing ; but she began to ask me about working, and if I could do the things that you and Margaret and Elizabeth do. I could not, of course, and I was *so* ashamed.”

“ If that is all, you can learn ; we will all teach you : better than reading for ever, I think,” said the sensible Sophy.

“ Well, but then, that led me on to think of other things,” continued Zaidee, laying down, meanwhile, upon her knee another attempted *chef-d’œuvre* ; “ and, Sophy, just suppose—suppose something happened, and we were all brought down to be very poor, and had to leave the Grange—in books, at least, such things are always happening—what *could* we do ? ”

“ Upon my word, unless you want to make people uncomfortable, I don’t see the good of asking,” said Sophy, with a little irritation. “ Suppose there should be a great civil war again, and somebody came to besiege the Grange, I cannot tell what we should do, for my part ; and the one is quite as likely as the other, if one wished to think of disagreeable things.”

Zaidee made no answer, and there was a pause.

It was twilight once more, and these two, the youngest of the family, sat alone by the fire in the young ladies' room.

“But if such a thing should happen,” resumed Sophy, her annoyance fading in the vague pleasure of speculation, “of course we would have to be content, and make up our minds to it, in the first place; then, of course, mamma would consider what was to be done, and—but, Zaidee, we should have nothing—we should be very, very poor.” Sophy broke off in sudden horror.

“That was what I meant all the time,” said Zaidee, with a sigh.

“Well, I am sure it is very wicked to try to frighten people,” said Sophy; “though it is nonsense, of course, and I need not care for it. Well, Philip and Percy, they would have to work at something immediately—and perhaps so would we all; and instead of being comfortable and rich, and having everything we wish for, we might come to need the very simplest things; and Elizabeth’s marriage broken off, very likely; and I am certain Mr Powis would never sigh, and look at Margaret any more; and there would be an end of us all.”

“Philip and Percy and Elizabeth!” Zaidee murmured the names with dismay; for her own fears had never realised the possibility of such a sweeping destruction.

“Yes,” said Sophy, with an air of injury, “that is what we would all have to look for, if another heir came to the Grange.”

“I did not think of anything half so bad,” said Zaidee, in a melancholy tone; “all that I thought of was, of what we must do if we were poor, and of leaving home. Would it break your heart, Sophy, to leave the Grange?”

Sophy hesitated. “Now, Zaidee, I would not be foolish if I were you. You don’t think we can live all our lives at the Grange?”

But the blank face of Zaidee looking up, actually persuaded Sophy that such a delusion was possible. And Sophy laughed, and a soft merry girlish blush ran over her face.

“I don’t think Elizabeth is breaking her heart,” said the younger sister, with again a little outbreak of laughter, “though she will go away so soon; and I don’t think—perhaps—I should break my heart myself; but this is all so foolish: you must make your romances by yourself, Zaidee, and I will go and ask mamma what colour this should be.”

So Zaidee was left in darkling solitude by the little fire, only Sermo and her own thoughts keeping her company. Many a romance, ending after the orthodox fashion in due and necessary marriage, had already danced through Zaidee’s thoughts; but Zaidee’s girlish

imagination was free as the wind, and she had not even begun to speculate on her own individual fate. Gravely she bent over the handful of red embers in the little fireplace, gravely lifted her eyes to the confused tumult of clouds sweeping quick across the pale autumn sky. Much like these same vapours were Zaidee's thoughts—vaguely disturbed, and full of dark uncertain hues, tossing hither and thither in wide sweeps and circles, but continually returning to their starting-point again.

Pure daylight was the very element of this family of Vivians. Margaret even was pensive only by an innocent, unconscious, youthful delusion ; there was neither mystery nor secrecy in the house—where no one was afraid of disclosing to the other everything which the other cared to see ; and where mother and children, brothers and sisters, lived in terms of perfect confidence, with neither divided interest nor divided affections, there was little left to wonder over, or to build speculations upon. Nor had even the story of the will arrested the quick imagination of Zaidee, until Mrs Wyburgh's hints and questions brought before her that favourite crisis and beginning of fictitious history—a lost inheritance, and a family overthrow. Zaidee Vivian had never been made aware of her state of dependence. It did not occur to her that her position was at all different from that of Sophy,

her nearest contemporary in the family ; and the good Vicaress might have spent a twelvemonth in hinting at poverty to come, before Zaidee would have learned to think of that poverty as threatening herself. Herself ! Zaidee had no idea of herself as a distinct person. She could realise family events very fully, but misfortune to her own individual being, save the misfortune of toothache or a cut finger, was the most intangible shadow in the world to the household favourite. So Zaidee took the view natural to her own mind and standing-point, and with a heart heavy at thought of these sad mishaps, which might threaten Philip, and Percy, and Elizabeth, in case "anything should happen," Zaidee sat still, and pondered over the waning fire.

Still the clouds swept darkly in misty masses over that pale black sky, at once luminous and colourless, the sky of autumn's stormy moods—and still, a hasty throng, silent and swift of foot, passed on the crowding medley of Zaidee's thoughts. Among them were abrupt scenes, sudden and unconnected—a melancholy departure from the Grange of the whole household suddenly breaking into the midst of a brighter picture, which represented Elizabeth's wedding and the bridegroom carrying his bride away. Then strangely enough Zaidee's fancy leapt away to Mrs Green's school friend, Charlotte Disbrowe, intended for family governess,

and suddenly snatched by her marriage from this desirable fate ; and making a rapid detour, Zaidee once more returned to herself.

It was a comfort to think that, “if anything did happen,” Zaidee herself, the poor little incapable, could “wait upon them all ;” and Zaidee, famous for quick conclusions, already saw herself in a great bib and apron, like the youngest little maid at the vicarage, and was rather proud than otherwise of the uniform which proclaimed her still of use. She saw herself ascending unknown staircases, and threading narrow passages, on errands of service to one and to another ; and Zaidee leant her own head on the head of Sermonicus, solemnly sitting by, and felt a tear come to her eye, as she wondered whether Sermo would stalk by her then with his stately pace as he did now. To be deprived of this companion would be indeed an affliction ; and Zaidee put her arms round Sermo’s neck, and sobbed over him in a little anticipatory heart-break. “But I will never leave you, Sermo ! Aunt Vivian will not give you to a stranger !” said Zaidee through her tears. Grave as he looked, Sermo was not a dog of melancholy temperament. Sermo’s quick ears had heard the tea-urn placed upon the table in the drawing-room, and Sermo’s sensitive nostril bore witness to a fragrant indication of toast and hot cake. So a canine humph, and a look towards the

door, was all the answer Sermo gave to the grief of his friend. It was enough to rouse Zaidee ; so she too dried her eyes, and put her hair in order, and went forth from her darkness to the light of the drawing-room, to the family conversation, and the family tea-table, where heartbreaks, either present or anticipatory, were things unknown.

## CHAPTER XV.

## A DISCOVERY.

OCTOBER was concluding, after the usual fashion of a Cheshire October. Let us do no injury to the milky county : it is only that peninsula which lies between the Mersey and the Dee, which entertains the winds. But however mildly the inland pastures might receive the coming winter, here was a prolonged gigantic equinox—gusts, strong-handed and impartial, tearing from every quarter of the heavens—persecuted clouds flying before them on every hand, violent swift descents of rain, and outbreaks of sunshine as sudden and violent. A most uncertain, fierce, Titanic sport of the elements ; but pleasure there certainly was in the tumult, so fresh, and bracing, and full of life—those great flashing rain-drops, which seemed to break in light and laughter as they fell under the overtaking sunbeams—those truant school-boy winds doing their pranks with such an air of exultant mischief—and those wild, grand, stormy sunsets, making

a glory all abroad upon the cloudy sky and threatening sea. A wilder stretch of weather, or a more enjoyable, to young health and vigorous nerves, never fell from the heavens, than the closing autumn of Philip Vivian's one-and-twentieth year.

The house within was full of the bustle of preparation. All those dainty bits of needlework, and delightful journeys of purchase-making, necessitated by Elizabeth's trousseau—all the internal arrangements necessary for the reception of important guests, and for the doubly important transactions of the coming era, filled the feminine part of the household with perpetual occupation. Philip, very full of the improvements about to be commenced on his ancestral acres, and with a somewhat shy, youthful pride, modest and manly, realising the growing importance of his own position, head of the family, and Master of the Grange—the Squire—had a no less busy life of it in toil and pleasure, breasting those brave winds day by day; while Percy, holding his headquarters in the library, in his character of student, and making erratic excursions into the special department of every other vested interest in the household, gave forth his boyish spirits very freely in preparation for that time of coming manhood to which the youth looked forward with anticipations so grand. Elizabeth's wardrobe increased at a wonderful rate. Mrs Vivian's household prepara-

tions went on with leisurely and well-regulated speed. It fared well with Margaret's labours, and with the tolerably well acquired music and much practised dances of Sophy. But, alas ! those equivocal and mysterious things called Percy's studies, were not more slow to take form and shape, than were the longed-for acquirements and accomplishments, the picture-drawing, and language-speaking, and fabulous feats of embroidery which had glimmered before the visionary eyes of Zaidee, when the vision of something about to happen had overwhelmed her heart.

It took "such a time!" to acquire an accomplishment. Such slow, weary, plodding work it was, after all ; and Zaidee had the sincerest detestation of all mental processes which were slow. Her first few days of strenuous application were soon over. Zaidee felt extremely virtuous, but it must be confessed very weary every night ; and in spite of all these lingering hours of industry, everybody else could do so much better than she. Sophy had rattled over ever so many bars of their duet while Zaidee was finding out the first chord. Elizabeth had painted the prettiest little rose-bud in the world, while Zaidee, with many wavering lines, compounded a morsel of stem ; and Margaret had actually read down to the farthest corner of the second page while Zaidee made out what was the first sentence in her French lesson. So Zaidee

reddened into indignation, and cooled into dislike. What good was there in them, after all? And once more the stately steps of Sermonicus pursued her flying feet through hall and passage, and Zaidee was herself once more.

Nevertheless, the haunting possibility of a suddenly-discovered will, and "something happening," never left Zaidee's mind. Not a bit of paper caught in the breeze without, or rustling along a windy passage within, escaped her eager pursuit and scrutiny; and with awe Zaidee opened the old volumes in the library which bore in fierce black characters the signature of her grandfather, and studied its every curve, as you might study the intricacies of a dangerous weapon. The subject possessed her imagination. From those most fantastic dreams of which her sleep was full, to the thronging visions of the day — everything was tinged with this, and it held stubborn possession of her own mind all the more that she never mentioned it again, even to Sophy, nor suffered one of her speculations on the subject to stray forth into words.

November had commenced. The ancient silver flagons, withdrawn from their treasury in Mrs Vivian's room, were polished to their brightest sheen, in preparation for the approaching day of family pomp and solemnity. Great daily rubbings and polishings took place in the ancient hall; the ancient coat-of arms was

anxiously investigated and found uninjured ; and every repository of lumber in the house was searched for bits of ancient tapestry thrust aside as useless years ago. There were old remnants of furniture, too, disposed of in various unused rooms, on which family councils were held from day to day. Some of these were picturesque, some of them only crazy, and no small number possessed both these qualities at once. On one of those occasions of general overturn, Zaidee had as usual formed one of the exploring party, of which Margaret was pioneer. The room was a very insignificant, disregarded room, lighted with a little window, so high up in the roof as to be almost a skylight, from which you had a far-off bird's-eye view of the sea. It had not been occupied perhaps for centuries, and was the veriest lumber-room in the whole house.

But this little close dusty apartment contained various rarities, and became for some hours the scene of the family campaign. Zaidee was last as usual, when with many echoes the train of invaders swept away ; for Zaidee, divided between the skylight and an old black-letter volume, had lost herself for the moment ; and Sermonicus, with solemn fidelity, yet with evident impatience, sat in the doorway, his allegiance binding him to remain, but all his inclinations prompting him to escape those falling clouds of

dust, and be present at the disposition of the recovered antiquities in the hall, which was henceforward to be their proper home. Sermo was a dog of highly conscientious feelings : the sense of duty was all in all with him ; so he elevated his delicate nostrils with the air of a stoic, and remained.

Zaidee cannot make very much of the black-letter ; but it is a great book, composed of a number of little ones very indiscriminately compounded, and enclosed in a vellum cover. There are some Latin treatises, some treatises in English — crabbed lengths of paragraph, with heads one, two, and three,—marginal notes, quotations, and all the pomp of antique theology. Not very attractive lore, Zaidee. Yet patience, better things may come.

And at last here are better things. Oh, these irregular lines — that dearly beloved broken column, that tells of verse ! And this is assuredly verse of the most fascinating kind — a true original romaut, a metrical legend in black-letter. Zaidee forgets at once the falling dust and the raised window, and sits down in a corner of the floor to read.

But by-and-by Zaidee comes upon marginal notes in a very coarse sprawling hand, like the unintelligible scribblings of some very illiterate reader, and rude hieroglyphics invading the printed page. Growing indignant — for Zaidee has the greatest reverence for

books, and cannot bear to see them handled disrespectfully—she hastily turns over the remaining leaves. A faint odour, as of smoke embalmed, is in these desecrated pages ; and where the scribbling pen has hastily stayed in a long broken line, a large long strip of paper, folded closely up, and burned at one edge—such a thing as might have lighted a very vulgar pipe withal—has been thrust in to keep the place.

With great indignation, snatching this out, Zaidee throws it on the floor, feeling very certain that some coarse serving-man, very probably one of that lawless crew of “Grandfather Vivian’s,” has contaminated this ancient book ; and, with a relieved mind, Zaidee reads on the further page, which has no scribbling to defile it, and loses herself once more.

Sermo, not caring to share her studies and take himself in farther to her dusty retreat—Sermo, who is a dog of active faculties, and loves not to be unoccupied—Sermo sniffs at the paper. Finding the odour not agreeable, Sermo tosses his head with offence, yet, preferring annoyance to languor, tries it again ; then lying down, unfolds the thing with his nose and a paw, and stretching across the threshold, gravely considers it as something which his mistress has committed to his special attention for his advice thereupon.

It is in this attitude that Zaidee finds her attendant

when she looks up from her book ; and Sermo seems to find considerable interest in the paper, after all, though it is charred and smoky, and has been in hands disrespectful of literature, and especially of this romaut in black-letter. Nevertheless, Zaidee stops to examine it too.

What is this ! “ Oh, Grandfather Vivian ! oh, Philip, Philip ! ” cries Zaidee, with something like a scream ; and snatching it from the ground, Zaidee closes the door, shuts out the wondering Sermo, closes even the window, and sits down once more upon the floor to read. Something *has* happened. The Will is found at last.

## CHAPTER XVI.

## THE FIRST GRIEF.

“I WISH some one would tell me what is the matter with Zaidee—the poor child looks broken-hearted. What ails your poor little cousin, Elizabeth? It grieves me to see her look so sad.”

“Indeed, I cannot tell, mamma,” says the sweet placid voice of Elizabeth, “unless it is Percy with some of his tricks.”

“I hope Percy does no tricks that would vex his cousin,” said Mrs Vivian, reddening in virtuous displeasure. “I should be very sorrow to believe such a thing of any son of mine.”

“I dare say Zaidee has only been reading a melancholy story,” suggested Margaret, “and having a cry over it—that is all.”

“Oh, indeed, it is something more than that,” said Sophy, with the dignified consciousness of superior information. “Since ever mamma told us that story of the will, Zay has been quite miserable, and sure we

should all come to poverty ; and she says every one of us can do something, but what could she do ; and is sure it would break her heart to leave the Grange. Mamma, I suppose we must all make up our minds to have our hearts broken when Philip gets married. We can't live in the Grange then."

" You had better make sure by a private enterprise of your own, Sophy," said the heir, half-laughing, half-frowning ; while Mrs Vivian's quick " hush, child ! " gave note that to Mrs Vivian the idea was by no means a delightful one.

" Poor little girl !—and she wants to do something," said Philip good-humouredly. " I think she would make a better officer for me than you, mother. She knows every volume in the library by headmark, I suppose. I'll set her to copying something for me there."

" But Zaidee writes so badly—it's quite disgraceful," said Margaret. " I am sure I cannot tell how she has managed to get herself neglected so."

At this moment Zaidee entered, not with the wild, swift, noiseless step of old, but with a timid deprecating motion as of one who came by sufferance—an intruder and alien here. Hearing Margaret's words, she raised her eyes for a moment, large, dilated, and unsteady, with a reproachful glance ; and there was a something of secret guiltiness and humility in Zaidee's

step and figure, which impressed the whole little family company strangely. Coming in as with some distinct purpose, Zaidee evidently faltered from her intention, and avoiding the group round the fireside, stole away towards the window, where she hovered about without either book or occupation ; starting, however, violently, when she heard her aunt's call—“ Zaidee, I want you here.”

Zaidee approached with a visible tremble, and every one looked at her, increasing her confusion. By this time, however, the poor girl's emotion began to grow intense, and she drew near Mrs Vivian's tribunal with her strong nervous tremor gradually subsiding into the calmness of great excitement. Her brown complexion marked her paleness more than Sophy's snowy purity could have done. Her swift silent step and downcast eyelids had something in them passionate and strange. No one spoke : an indefinite silent recognition of something unknown and powerful entering among them, checked the smile of kind encouragement on Philip's lips, and suppressed Sophy's mocking *badianage*. At this moment no one knew very well what to make of this excited girl.

Mrs Vivian raised herself erect in her great chair. The floating drapery of the white Shetland shawl enveloped the back of this solemn piece of furniture like a cloud ; and Mrs Vivian's small handsome person,

distinctly standing out against it, assumed all the state and all the stature which was possible to its delicate proportions. Poor Zaidee, in all her distress and excitement, could not help thinking once more of the fairy godmother ready to ride away in her coach, from sad Cinderella's dimmed and disenchanted life. A something of whimsical association, half-grotesque and half-pathetic, brought the similitude home to Zaidee's own oppressed and trembling heart.

“My dear child!”—Mrs Vivian made a very solemn beginning—“I want to know what makes you so very sad and troubled. It is not natural at your years, Zaidee, and it is not natural to you. We have all observed it. Now, I expect you to be quite frank with me, and tell me what it is.”

“Nothing, Aunt Vivian.” Larger and larger grow those swelling downcast eyelids, and there is a perceptible quiver in the compressed lip.

“Nothing, Zaidee? But I am quite sure there is something, and I am not easily deceived,” said Mrs Vivian. “Has any one been vexing you, child? Was it Percy?—or tell me who it was?”

“Indeed, Aunt Vivian, it was not any one; I am not vexed—indeed, I am quite well,” said Zaidee in a half whisper; for she was very much afraid that it must run over, this blinding moisture in her eyes.

“I am sure you know every one wishes to see you

happy, Zaidee," continued the old lady. " You have no reason to be afraid of me, or any of your cousins. You surely don't hesitate to say anything to us?"

" No, Aunt Vivian." But Zaidee does not look up, does not slide down to her usual place, or change her position ; and standing there in her controlled and suppressed grief, with her downcast eyes so full and visibly glistening over their long lashes, her brown complexion so palid and colourless, her lip trembling so evidently, looks such a monument of youthful concealed despair and sorrow, that Mrs Vivian, piqued and distressed, grows impatient, her anxiety balked, and her curiosity irritated at the same time.

" I shall be obliged to consider you a very obstinate girl, Zaidee," said the peremptory mistress of the Grange. " It is quite impossible you can have any trouble which ought to be concealed from me. I assure you I feel both hurt and displeased. I have always thought I had my children's confidence, and I am very sure I have given you no cause to fear trusting me."

" Oh, mamma ! " said Sophy, in dismay. Sophy feared the poor culprit might be overwhelmed with this reproach.

But Zaidee acknowledged it only by an increased tremble of her lip, and still made no response.

" Zaidee is only out of sorts or out of humour a

little, and you will make her think she is quite a martyr," said Philip, rising ; and he laid his hand kindly on her shoulder. " Now, don't look despairing, Zed ; nobody is angry ; confess you were only sulky, and that Percy or some of us plagued you—no such great matter. Laugh, and let my mother see it is no tragical affair after all."

But Zaidee shrank from his touch, and broke forth into a passion of reluctant tears. " Nobody plagued me, neither Percy nor any one. I wish you would not be kind to me. Oh, Philip, not you !—not you ! I wish you would never speak to me again."

And Zaidee slid down to the carpet, and sat there in a complete abandonment of grief, covering her face with her hands. The others looked on amazed and bewildered. Elizabeth bent over her, softly trying to draw away her hands, and whispering " Zaidee, Zaidee," in her own gentlest tone. Margaret sat still, vague ideas of romantic passion, and falling in love, perplexing *her* mind. Sophy cried ; and Philip exclaimed aloud, with an impatience kindred to his mother's, " What on earth did she mean ?"

The voice and the tone seemed to startle Zaidee. All at once her sobbing ceased. With sudden composure she rose and stood before the great chair once more. " If you please, Aunt Vivian," said Zaidee, very humbly, " I don't mean anything—nobody has

vexed me—nothing ails me ; and I wanted to ask you if you would give me something to do."

Sophy, defrauded of her sympathy, stopped in the middle of her crying. "Mamma, I told you it's all her nonsense after all," cried Sophy, indignantly ; and Sophy dried her tears with an angry hand, and went away in great displeasure to the other end of the room. Zaidee remained standing before Mrs Vivian's chair ; but Philip, looking back as he went out, could not subdue the startled curiosity and interest which succeeded to his momentary laugh, as he saw his young cousin, abstracted and silent, listening to his mother's lecture on the over-indulgence of her feelings. This was a strange passion for a child.

## CHAPTER XVII.

## DESPAIR.

BUT while Zaidee's passionate excitement passed over and was gone, the deeper cloud of her distress remained unenlightened. The family preparations for the family jubilee, the family researches for interesting memorials of the old Vivians and their ancestral life, went on without intermission ; but Zaidee no longer followed, the laggard of the party, finding out dusty corners which no one else knew of, and terrifying the elders of the exploring band by daring feats of investigation which no one else ventured. It was strange to find what a loss she was, with those quick eyes of hers and rapid movements, and how her strange heterogeneous knowledge, her intuitive perception of picturesque antiquities and ancient uses, came to be missed in all they did without her presence. Nobody had ever fancied truant Zaidee of any service—nobody could remember any particular office of assistance she had ever done, or suggestion made—yet everybody

wanted her, and wondered at her absence. A hundred inquiries, “Where was Zaidee?” echoed through the windy passages of the Grange. She was often very close at hand, listening to these calls upon her, but Zaidee never came.

Perhaps she sits—far away from Aunt Vivian in her easy-chair by the fire—in the recess of yon great mullioned window, very silent, like a figure in a picture, and very intent upon her work. This work is no longer embroidery or some great invention in bright-coloured silk and velvet. The strangest whim in the world, everybody thinks, is this which Zaidee has taken into her fanciful brain; for the very homeliest domestic sewing which Aunt Vivian could be persuaded to give her, lies upon Zaidee’s knee, and occupies her sedulous hands—work which might be done by the servants, so very “plain” is it—work for the real humble uses of the family; but no one knows the profound sentiment with which Zaidee bends over this, her fingers faltering sometimes, her eyes filling, and all her heart in her unattractive labour. It is like a picture altogether, this great, bright, well-ordered, silent room. The fireside glitters, and the fire burns with a clear undemonstrative glow, shining red and clear upon that distinct small old lady, so alert and full of business, in the great chair and high footstool, with writing materials and sewing materials, letters

and books, pieces of cambric and lace, that tell of the coming bridal, upon the table by her side, and the bright steel embellishments of the hearth twinkling with a ruddy glow from the deep rich crimson of that great mossy rug below her feet. The sun comes in through the curtains of the long modern windows behind, stretching in a lengthy prolonged line, to reach if possible the daylight from the other end, but striking bright upon the wall long before it reaches Zaidee, whose seat is in the extreme recess. There is coloured glass in the upper part of this great mullioned window, and the daylight is not sunny which fills all its diamond panes below ; but full in its serene illumination, in her brown plain girlish dress, with her pale sun-burnt absorbed face, her stooping head and down-cast eyes, sits Zaidee, silent and motionless, save for the breath that quickens and grows languid with the current of her thoughts, and those long taper fingers which labour on without a pause ; yet scarcely without a pause—for sometimes Zaidee's thoughts crowd on her so, that all unconsciously her hands and her work drop upon her knee, and her wistful eyes look forth from the window, full of a strange depth of solitude and sadness. Looking forth from the window, you see those long stretches of solitary road—those trees waving wildly in the wind—those masses of tumultuous cloud hurrying as if pursued along the sky ; and

your glance grows wistful and searching, like Zaidee's eyes, as you turn from that lonely prospect to this silent interior once again.

At Zaidee's feet lies Sermonicus, very grave, extremely observant and curious. Sometimes he reposes his solemn head upon her foot by way of making her aware of his presence, sometimes spreads out the long hoary fawn-coloured fringes of his paw upon the edge of her gown, but always watches her with a grave and sedulous attention,—the attention of one who partly knows her secret, and with much cogitation labours at it, putting this and that together, hoping in time to come to know it all.

Or perhaps Zaidee, carefully shut in to that high chamber, whose window overlooks the sea, sits pondering over the black-letter volume, with its vellum cover. In this great book Zaidee reads no more. To tell the truth, she reads very little in any book now. What she found within these pages seems to have satisfied her strangely ; and yet there is a certain fascination about this book. The long strip of scorched paper still holds its place between the leaves. Sometimes by stealth, and with a quickened pulse, Zaidee reads this scrap of manuscript, but most frequently only looks that it is there, and sits down beside it to think, laying her hand closely upon the vellum board, and pressing it down. Many times she brings a candle

with her, which shows strangely in the daylight, and taking out that dreadful document with a trembling hand, holds it *almost* over the flame, but always withdraws it in terror ; for Zaidee has a child's dread of doing anything on her own responsibility, and fears to destroy this paper much as she longs to do so. If any extremity comes, any chance of discovery, *that* will give her courage, but she is never bold enough now for such an independent act. At present she can only guard the dangerous possession with the carefulness of extreme terror ; and when the impulse comes upon her of looking out, which it does often, Zaidee carefully carries this volume with her, and sets her foot upon it, while she stands at the window. All these strange and mystical proceedings Sermo carefully notes and ponders, but it does not seem that Sermo makes much of them, for an air of much abstraction and bewilderment gradually comes over his sage and meditative face.

These are the quiet moods of Zaidee's secret suffering ; but when the wind is wilder than its wont, in these lingering twilights of the early winter, the young solitary sets forth on melancholy pilgrimages, to the much discomfiture of Sermo. Not far off is a little remnant of a wood—Zaidee at least likes to think it so, though there are irreverent speculators who call her bit of forest only a fir plantation. However that

may be, the place is wild enough, with its slippery underground, thick with so many layers of the fallen spiky leaflets of those grim Scotch firs, always green, always fierce, defiant, and gloomy, that wave their wild branches above. Over this tawny carpet, strewn with fir-tops, and broken with little patches of wild gorse and blighted heather, gliding through those long avenues, bare-columned trunks of fir-trees, striking against the pale line of sky, Zaidee comes and goes, noiselessly thinking her heavy thoughts ; or sometimes sitting on a fallen tree, looking into a clear black pool, a miniature moorland lake, listens to the wind sweeping among the rustling branches overhead, one of the eeriest sounds in nature, and gives herself up to the full indulgence of her young unlimited sorrow. Sermo meanwhile, in much discomfort couching by her side, sniffs the wind with defiance, and howls in a complaining undertone—much disquieted with the wild sweeping motion of those ghostly branches above him, much marvelling by what strange chance his youthful mistress should prefer this strange out-of-doors tumult to the ruddy drawing-room of the Grange ; for Sermo's gravest deliberations cannot fathom Zaidee's secret still.

What is it Zaidee says in the murmuring outcries of her girlish distress ? A vague appeal to some one,

the natural voice of helplessness ; and sometimes the most sacred and solemn of names breaks faintly from her lips ; but the burden of all is—" What shall I do ? what can I do ? "—and Zaidee wrings her hands in an agony, and thinks her heart will break.

Poor little self-consuming generous heart ! so unlearned and unexperienced in such a sore and singular strait, shut out from all natural advice and comfort ! Zaidee is only fourteen, a very simple, unknowing, truthful child, her only lore the teachings of romance, and that one lofty, divine, and wonderful story, which suggests all sacrifice by the unapproachable self-offering which redeemed the world ; and if this little pool were deep enough, and such a way of settling the matter could but seem "right," this sincere and downright child's spirit would not stumble at it for a moment. Many a thought of the kind comes in Zaidee's mind, as all the possibilities of her position, and all the harm her hitherto harmless existence may do, throng upon her, and excite her into a tumult of despairing doubts and questionings—what can she do ? At forty it is not always easy to answer such a question—at fourteen what should it be ? And not a counsellor in all the world has Zaidee, not one to whom she dares disclose her difficulty ; none even but Sermo—poor, faithful, bewildered Sermo, whose straining faculties cannot

make it out—on whom she can lean when she weeps. But it is still some comfort to see his wistful face looking up into her own—some support to lay her arm upon him—to cry, “Oh, Sermo, Sermo, what shall I do?” even though Sermo has no answer to make to the cry of her distress.

## C H A P T E R   X V I I I .

## THE CLERGY.

A LITTLE group of reverend gentlemen stand in the porch of Briarford school. The subdued hum behind, full of awe and a little excitement—the sun-burnt urchin peeping from the window, with his hand over his eyes for custom's sake, to shade him from the sun, though no sun is here—the neat little woman curtseying and respectful behind, taking leave of the Vicar and his reverend associates, give you note that some pastoral oversight or examination has been going on in this small noisy sheepfold to-day.

First of all, here is Mr Wyburgh, vicar of the parish. If the good man were minded to disguise himself, scarcely a scarlet coat could serve the purpose, for his trim and snowy linen, his close clerical vest and spotless costume, his stiff plain band of white neck-cloth, is not more distinctly and decorously professional, than is the very voice and smile, the little gesture of the reverend hand, and measured cadence of

the respectable footstep, so familiar on all parochial highways. You will perceive that the Rev. Richard Wyburgh is what, when we would speak after a complimentary fashion, we call “under the middle size”—in plainer words, a small spare figure, without an ounce of superfluous weight to encumber his activity; not a strong man by nature, but knitted into sinewy vigour by a life of patient exertion, undemonstrative and unboastful; a little short-sighted, as those concentrated puckers round his keen, kindly, twinkling eyes bear witness; a little bald, with thin locks half-way between white and sand colour in complexion, and strangely feathery in texture, fringing his well-formed head; otherwise not a sign of age about him—as quietly alert and full of spirit as in his youth.

A singularly different person is Mr Wyburgh’s curate, who stands beside him. Tall, lank, stooping, and “ill put together,” there is not much that you can call handsome in the outer man of good John Green; and poor Angelina, though she sighs over them most dolefully, cannot manage to bleach those refractory neckcloths into anything like the purity of Mr Wyburgh’s. This prosaic and commonplace care is a very novel one for the Curate’s pensive bride; but, after all, she would do her duty if she could; and it is melancholy to see the Rev. John, how he holds out these neckcloths at arm’s-length, and shakes his head

with a comic ruefulness before he puts them on—though he is, after all, so much of a sloven by nature, that this is a fitting chastisement of his own evil ways. Mr Green's coats, however made, wear into a peculiar fashion of their own : the skirts so soon learn to hang heavy with ponderous volumes, of which burden they retain the shape even when itself is removed, and the collar stands out high and distinct from the neck, which slants away from it, stooping forward. Mr Green carries a prodigious stick, a most truculent and suspicious-looking bludgeon, and has a wardrobe of handkerchiefs of all the colours of the rainbow thrust into one pocket, to balance the book in the other. So it is in reality a very odd figure which overshadows the Vicar, drawing back a little within the porch of the village school.

The third person is Mr Powis, rector of the small adjoining parish of Woodchurch, cadet of the antediluvian great family in Wales, servant and suitor of Margaret Vivian of the Grange ; and it is needless to say how unstained and glossy, how irreproachable, at once in worldly fashion and in clerical propriety, is the costume of Mr Powis, in whom is nothing odd, nothing characteristic, not a stray lock or a spot of dust, to suggest to you that he has not newly stepped from his dressing-room—or “from a bandbox,” as the village critics say. Daylight does not detract from the

good looks of Mr Powis ; he is still a very handsome young man, and not exactly a coxcomb either, but with grace enough to be slightly shy in his consciousness of his own good looks. You could not find in all the county three men who have less natural affinity ; and Mr Powis, with distinct politeness, and Mr Green, with a lumbering impatience much more sincere but not quite so courteous, stand lingering and holding apart, to hear the little lecture on education, on its importance, and the extreme necessity of clerical supervision, which Mr Wyburgh delivers with his clear voice and his forefinger, for the instruction of his juniors, who are by no means anxious to be instructed.

And now they advance along the village street towards the Vicarage ; Mr Wyburgh and Mr Powis, extremely decorous representatives of the ecclesiastical estate, proceeding in good step and line ; Mr Green sometimes straying a little before, sometimes falling a little behind. And now before the vision of the reverend brethren appears the high-seated Grange, overlooking village and country, with its background of trees waving in the brisk Cheshire gale ; the clouds afloat around it like aerial companions, and the sun striking red and cheery upon its shining roof and picturesque gables, but leaving the front in shade. A smile in which there was just a suspicion of com-

placency and simpering, and a little sigh sentimental and conscious, came to the lip of the young Rector, in acknowledgment of the home of his lady and love.

“A pleasant family the Vivians—a great addition to the society here,” says Mr Powis, with an air of abstraction. Society is a word very much in Mr Powis’s mouth.

“Capital young people, sir—excellent girls,” answers the Vicar. “Many a cottage in Briarford will miss Miss Vivian when she is married. That is to be immediately. By the by, Mr Green, I think of asking Philip for a bit of ground behind the hill yonder for our district school ; a good situation, sir ; capital for the poor brickmakers, who begin to squat about there in these wretched huts of theirs. We must do something for these poor fellows, Mr Green.”

“Rogues and reprobates,” said Mr Green laconically, shaking his head.

“The more reason we should do something for them—the more reason,” said Mr Wyburgh. “Philip Vivian must take measures, sir, to improve the condition of his tenantry, now he is come to man’s estate. Not that I complain of his mother—a most admirable person ; but Philip is young, and has all his life before him. We must do great things in this parish yet.”

“Do they have much intercourse with Castle

Vivian, I wonder?" said Mr Powis. "Sir Francis is a very influential person. Are our friends on good terms with the other branch of the family, Mr Wyburgh?"

"I have heard of Sir Francis Vivian," said the Vicar, in his turn shaking his head; "but I think my knowledge goes no further. They are on good terms undoubtedly; family feuds are unknown at the Grange; but I suppose there is little intercourse. I never remember to have seen their relation here."

"A great pity," lamented Mr Powis. "So influential a person as Sir Francis Vivian is an invaluable friend for young men. I have heard he has a great deal in his power."

A slight half-perceptible sigh concluded this speech. The Vicar turned his quick eyes with an intelligent penetrating glance upon his young companion, and there was something of irony in the Vicar's smile.

"Church preferment, a large share? I have heard of that," said the Vicar quickly.

"I cannot say. General influence in the world, and active life, is what I mean," said Mr Powis, with momentary confusion. "Large landed property and wide family connections make almost any man important, and Sir Francis is an extremely energetic man—certain to advance any one in whom he took an interest—an invaluable friend."

“Good for Percy Vivian,” said the Curate, “if Percy were a steady fellow, and would work at anything—which he won’t do.”

“Time enough, sir, time enough. We never do great things when we are boys at home,” said the kind Vicar. “I would rather not trust to any Sir Francis, for my part. A good life and a true, where independence is, has more comfort in it than preferment. I have always found it so.”

“I cannot see what possible cause there is why the one should compromise the other,” said Mr Powis coldly, but with an increasing colour and some annoyance; and the young Rector was very well pleased to turn aside, and take leave of Mr Green at the Vicarage door. Mr Powis was to dine at the Vicarage to-day, not greatly to his own enjoyment; but it was one of the professional duties which this most proper and exemplary youth would not neglect on any score.

Mr Green, who had dined already, lumbered on upon his way; and shooting like a great cloud into the dim little parlour, where Angelina had at last been persuaded to have a fire, stood turning his back upon the shadowed window, and spreading his great hands over the grate for a moment before he sought his own more special retirement.

“There’s that young Powis asking all sorts of questions about some great friends the Vivians have in the

other end of the county," said the Curate. " If your friend Miss Margaret is to have him, Lina, she had better look up all her connections. A pretty fellow ! I believe he likes her too ; yet if they could not help him up the ladder, Margaret Vivian might pine herself to death for aught he cared. Pity that she gives him such a chance. But we're all fools enough in such concerns."

So saying, the good Curate swept away, knocking half-a-dozen little books off a table with a whisk of his heavy skirt as he passed, and putting in serious jeopardy Angelina's inkstand, and the light-coloured carpet which an ink stain would "ruin." Escaping rather more swiftly than he intended, after this, Mr Green saw nothing of the dark slender figure in shadow of his wife's green curtains, who had heard all he had to say ; and only some ten minutes after, when, glancing up from his own window at a passing shadow, Mr Green saw Zaidee Vivian hurry forth from the door, did the horror of having made this speech to other ears than his wife's break upon him. Starting up, he hurried again, lumbering and disquieted, to Angelina's parlour. Yes, without dispute, Zaidee had been there.

" She will never think of it again," said the Curate, rubbing his forehead ruefully. " That girl is always dreaming and abstracted—she will never think of it more." So saying, Mr Green charmed away his own

annoyance by the headlong plunge he made into next week's sermon, wherein the divine speedily forgot that there was such a family as the Vivians in the world.

Nor could the Curate have guessed, by any possible reasoning, how heavily these words fell upon poor Zaidee's heart, or how she lingered on her homeward way, desolate and solitary, with the last overwhelming drop hanging on the brim of that cup of bitterness, which was almost too much for her hand to hold.

## CHAPTER XIX.

## FAMILY PROSPECTS.

“I THINK, mamma, it would be good for Zaidee to go with me,” said Elizabeth; “she grows very pale, and looks very sad. Poor child, the change would rouse her again. What can be the matter, I wonder? But I think she should go with me.”

“Bernard would not like it, Elizabeth,” said Mrs Vivian.

“Bernard could say so, mother,” said the bride, with her sweet tranquil composure, and her faint passing blush. “We have not so slight a confidence in each other surely *now*, that we cannot speak without disguise. If it displeases Bernard, he will tell me; but I do not think it can.”

“Bernard will not like to share your company with any one. I should not be pleased if he did,” said Mrs Vivian. “Your Aunt Blundell is going to London. I did think I should send Sophy and Zaidee with her for a little change. I confess, Elizabeth, Zaidee be-

wilders me ; and she is not ill either, for I have spoken to Dr Ellis. This is, let me see, the 10th of November—in a fortnight comes Philip's birthday, and the 27th is your *fête*, Lizzy. If all this—her new dresses, and the present I have for her, and being one of your bridesmaids, and all the gaiety—makes no improvement, I shall certainly send Zaidee away for a change."

"Take my advice for once, mamma—send her to school," said Margaret. "I am quite ashamed, for my part. We have all a tolerable education but Zaidee. It is quite a disgrace to us how she has been neglected."

"You forget that I am in fault, if that is the case," said the mother quickly. "Zaidee has not been neglected—nonsense ; but I daresay she has been spoiled. Six months at a good school might do very well, and improve her greatly ; I shall certainly think of that. But you must not take her, Elizabeth,—certainly not—on a wedding tour. The thing is quite out of the question."

She looked like a queen assenting graciously to some great edict concerning a nation. But Elizabeth only said, "Very well, mother, if you think so," as she turned away. Elizabeth did not ask to be convinced, and that sweet grace of acquiescence with which will and personal opinion had so little to do, had a singular conformity with the majestic looks of this simple-hearted bride.

“We are almost ready, mamma,” said Margaret. “I wonder if I could finish my poor little picture before Lizzy comes home to Morton Hall. There is really nothing to do now, except what must be done at the time; and all the things are so well prepared, and all the servants so interested to have them right. I don’t think we have forgotten anything, which is rare enough when there is so much to do. I think I may perhaps get my picture finished, after all.”

“Has any one seen it lately?” said Mrs Vivian, in the same undertone in which her daughter spoke. This picture, crown of all the love-tokens which Elizabeth should carry with her, was “a great secret,” intended to be hung privately in the bride’s own retirement in her new home, to surprise her when she returned, and was laboured at with great mystery, and in the strictest seclusion, though Margaret had so many confidants as to startle her with perpetual fears of discovery.

“No, mamma; no one to speak of—only—oh yes, there was Mr Powis,” said Margaret, blushing deeply. “That was Sophy’s fault; she is so unguarded—it was not mine.”

“And what did Mr Powis say?” said the mother, who was certainly not displeased.

“Oh, Mr Powis thought very well of it,” said Margaret hurriedly, with an attempt at being careless;

"a great deal better than I do, I am sure. I daresay he did not think I could do anything of the kind. Philip and Percy are coming to lunch, mamma—I can see them. Oh no, indeed, it is not Philip—I do believe it is *that* Mr Powis again."

"Well, he is not a ghost to startle you so," said Mrs Vivian with a smile; "and we must give him some lunch, I fancy. Philip is in the library—go and call him, and don't look frightened. Lizzy, Bernard is not near so handsome as Mr Powis."

"Do you think so, mother?" said Elizabeth. She was returning from the little room at the moment, and a bright sparkle of mirth and satisfaction awoke in Elizabeth's smile.

"I am sure of it," said the gratified mother, smiling too, and scarcely with less brightness. "There is Sophy grows pretty like the rest of you, and by-and-by I suppose I shall grumble, like poor Mrs Morris, that there is no rest for me till you are all gone. A bad example, Lizzy—and to be set by you!"

"I am four-and-twenty, mamma. At least I have been in no haste to leave home," said Elizabeth, with her tranquil grace, drawing a seat to the table by her mother's side.

The tears came to the mother's eyes. Something, that sounded indistinctly like a blessing on "my dear child," fell like music on the ear of Elizabeth; but

the others were trooping in by different doors to this little family refreshment;—Philip from the library, with Margaret in her fresh sweet flush of awakened feeling—shy, and hanging back upon his arm ; and handsome Mr Powis, very eager to please everybody ; and Percy, with so much bright affection, fun, and mischief in his eyes. As they took their places round the table—this kindly table, which was used for all purposes, and was not above a comfortable mid-day meal—Mrs Vivian had to raise her quick hand to her eyes once more before she could see them all clearly;—those young, joyous faces, those lives so rich with immeasurable hope. She thought she had never realised so fully before the bright unclouded future which lay before these dearest children—that they themselves had never seen its fulness of blessing so well.

The door opened again. This time it is Sophy, flushed and eager, solemnly followed, first by Sermonicus, afterwards by Zaidee, looking so pallid, dark, and pale, like the autumn sky, and with something of dogged and obstinate resistance in her face. Sophy, who has evidently something to tell, and whose excitement, much different from her cousin's, makes all her lilies and roses only the prettier in their flush and glow, begins hastily, “ Mamma !”—but catching a sudden glimpse of Mr Powis, pauses and grows embarrassed, stopping in her course a little within the door.

“What is it, Sophy? No secret, I should think,” said Mrs Vivian, with a slight frown, calling her forward. Mrs Vivian was much too polite to let even a chance guest fancy himself in the way.

“Mamma, I want to tell you of Zaidee,” said Sophy hurriedly. “I am sure it is something wrong—it must be something wrong, or she never would have hidden it from me. I have watched her since ever she began to be so sad, and she is constantly stealing away to the little room where Margaret found that oak chair. She has something there, mamma! I cannot tell what it is—something she hid away in a great book, looking as if she could have killed me. I am very sorry for Zay. I would not vex her for the world,” said Sophy, the tears coming against her will; “but only look at her now—see how she looks at us all—and make her tell what she has there.”

Sophy’s excitement was so real and genuine, and Zaidee’s blank gloom of despair so evident, that every one was startled. Mrs Vivian rose almost with a tremble. “I do not understand what all this means,” said Mrs Vivian. “What is it, Zaidee? Sophy, you must calm yourself. Sit down, child, and tell me what it is.”

“It is nothing, Aunt Vivian,” said Zaidee; but Zaidee’s voice was hoarse and strained, and had a sound so unnatural, that Elizabeth and Philip rose

at once from the table and hurried towards her too.

“ If it is nothing, show it to mamma ; show it to Philip,” cried Sophy eagerly. “ Oh Zay, only let anybody see it ! it cannot be nothing if you hide it so.”

“ Where is the place ? ” said Philip. Zaidee looked up at him wildly, into his clear prompt eyes, and, with a cry, sprang from the hands extended to detain her, and fled from the room like a startled deer.

## CHAPTER XX.

## ANOTHER DISCOVERY.

SHE could hear his steps behind her in swift pursuit as she flew along those bewildering passages, and Zaidee's feet rang upon them in the wild pace of despair. Reaching the door at last, Zaidee swung it behind her in the force of her excitement, and snatched at the book in which her secret lay. But, alas ! she had only plucked the paper out, and held it visible in her trembling fingers, when Philip entered after her into the little distant room.

Philip was considerably excited, too ; for neither frolic nor trifle was consistent with the strange desperation of Zaidee's face. "Come, let me see it, Zed," he said, with a half smile. "What is this mystery ? Zaidee, give the paper to me."

But Zaidee, with her wild despairing face, looked up to him and clenched her hands upon the treasure she held. "Don't, Philip ! it's only mine. *I* found it—don't take it from me !" cried Zaidee ; and her breast

heaved almost to bursting with a great, tearless, convulsive sob.

“This is something serious,” said Philip Vivian. “No trifle could move you to such passion. I must see the paper. Zaidee, this is like a boy—not like a woman.”

She had been holding it still with a wild struggle to retain possession. At these words Zaidee’s hands fell; she could resist no longer, deep shame overpowering for the moment even the stronger emotions which had inspired her resistance; and with a scared and colourless face, trembling, but perfectly silent, she turned upon him the breathless eager observation of a child.

The paper rustled in Philip’s hand. Philip’s strong youthful frame wavered for a single instant, as if before a sudden blow; then he went on steadily to the end; and even when he had reached the end, was silent still, like a man stunned, and needing time to recover. Then once more the young man looked up, and now, as colourless as Zaidee’s, blanched and ghastly was Philip’s face, and his tongue stammered, and clove to his mouth as he began to speak. “Where did you find it?—why did you not bring it at once to me?”

Poor Zaidee made no answer—only another loud, strong sob, without the relief of tears, burst from her lip. Over her eyes lay a burning, heavy weight, but

she could not weep. There was no softening film upon her vision to hide Philip's face, and the sudden stroke of calamity which he manfully laboured to bear up against, but scarcely could in this moment of overthrow. Again the same question, and Philip's lips were parched, and faltered still.

Zaidee was struck with all a woman's awe and compassion for the suffering of the man before her. She could not bear it. Involuntarily she sank down upon the ground at his feet, and touched them humbly. "Philip, it broke my heart," said poor Zaidee, and she lifted up to Philip's eyes a face which bore full testimony to the truth of what she said.

Philip threw himself abruptly upon an old bench which they had left here, the only piece of furniture in the desolate little room, and, bending down his head, covered his face with his hands. Why should he be too proud to acknowledge that this blow stunned and stupified him? It is no such easy thing to lose an inheritance, the certain patrimonial right to which a man is born—no such light matter, in the flush of early youth and happy prospect, to look these things called beggary and ruin suddenly, without a moment's preparation, full in the face. Into this chamber of fate Philip had entered only a few seconds ago, the young Squire, the Lord of the Manor, heir and master of the Grange. Now the poorest peasant in Briarfard was

a less penniless man than he. And all the misfortunes involved—the possible consequences to his mother and sisters, the overwhelming change in his own destiny, the overthrow of Percy's dreamings—flashed upon the young man's mind. A single groan, low and bitter, burst from his heart ; it was impossible to feel and see and experience all the depths of this fully, and make no sign.

But Philip felt the humble touch of Zaidee's hand, and indistinctly saw her at his feet. Then he remembered all her solitary misery, her woe-begone and ghostlike face, her childish forlorn unhappiness, her very words so recently spoken, "it broke my heart"—and Philip's heart was moved with a softening compassion, which brought heavy tears to his eyes in the weakness of his own calamity. He put out his hand unsteadily to lay it on her head. "Poor child !" said Philip ; and he, too, was so young—a homebred inexperienced youth ; and they burst together into one sympathetic outbreak of sudden tears.

Only a few great burning drops, which he hid with his hands in the shame of manhood ; but they did relieve the *hysterica passio* which struggled at his breast ; and Philip Vivian looked down once more on his little orphan cousin, now weeping in wild abandonment, all her defences broken down. "Poor child !" repeated the disinherited heir, whom Zaidee's hapless

existence deprived of his birthright—and tender compassion, true and brotherly, was in Philip's heart. He thought it was a very sad fate to be the means of depriving one's dearest friends of all they had in the world. He never for a moment supposed that Zaidee could find any counterbalancing comfort in the inheritance which she gained ; and it seemed to Philip's ingenuous, unworldly eyes, as if his own misfortune was actually less than hers. His heart was full of the sincerest, unaffected pity for Zaidee, and he laid his hand upon her drooping head, with a vain attempt to comfort her, and repeated again, “Poor child !”

And Zaidee suddenly stayed her weeping, and took his hand within her own. “Philip,” she said, looking up with sudden courage, “you will not make us all unhappy—you will not kill *me*? I cried, because I had nothing in the world to give you on your birthday. Philip, will you take this from poor Zaidee? You never were cruel to any one all your life before. Do not shake your head, and hide your face. Oh, Philip, you would not kill *me*? ”

“No, Zay ; I would not harm you for all the pride on earth,” said Philip, with strange and touching humility ; “and I am grieved for you more than I can say. But the Grange is yours, Zaidee. Neither it, nor this sacred piece of paper, can I accept from you. I know your heart very well, how sincere it is, but you

are only a child ; and I ”——The young man rose with a singular boyish perception of his manhood, erect and noble——“I, though I am now a very poor man, helpless in the eyes of the world—I am your natural protector, Zaidee, and bound to see that you have all your rights.”

“It is not my right—it is your right, Philip!” cried Zaidee, starting up in her turn with flashing eyes. “My grandfather Vivian was mad—he must have been mad, or he could not have done anything like this. And Grandfather Vivian never thought of me ; it was my father he thought of. My father is dead. Me ! I am no one—I am only a woman, Philip ! It was never meant for me.”

But Philip remained unmoved. The youth had recovered his balance of mind and purpose ; and though his heart was heavy still, a hundred sudden springing hopes roused him already to strength and confidence. Something slightly comforting, too, was in this last view of the subject which he had just taken. A will could disinherit Philip, but no will could make him less the head of the family, the representative of the ancient line, the dedicated champion and defender of all its children and its rights. A chivalrous glow warmed the breast, which this stroke had stunned for the moment, and with a grace of generous love and protection, he held out his hand to this “poor child.”

“Come, Zaidee, they must all know,” said Philip. As he spoke, his face once more clouded. This was no pleasant news to carry to them in their happy family assembling ; and however he might master the calamity in his own person, it was very hard to realise it once again for them. He took Zaidee’s hand almost with solemnity, he scarcely heard her renewed burst of supplication and tears ; and Zaidee could not struggle against the absorbed force of decision and purpose in her cousin’s face. Very pale, very awe-stricken and silent, she submitted to his guidance, and they went down solemnly together to the family room.

## CHAPTER XXI.

## A FAMILY MISFORTUNE.

THE family party had been excited in no small degree by the sudden flight of Zaidee and pursuit of Philip. Mrs Vivian and her elder and younger daughters gathered together in a little group apart, in considerable anxiety and dismay, fearing something, though they could not tell what. Percy was expostulating. Margaret alone, occupied with other thoughts, sat in her place by the table, persuading herself that common civility demanded of her some answer to Mr Powis's soft-toned speeches. Mr Powis seemed rather to enjoy the confusion, Margaret thought, and insensibly his chair had approached her own.

“Because it pleases Zay, a romantic young lady, to make a little mystery,” said the sensible Percy—“everybody knows the habits of young ladies—because this X Y Z of ours has some crotchet in her brain, here are you all disturbing yourselves as if there was an earthquake. You, mother!—and even so composed a person

as Elizabeth. I suppose this little bit of excitement is a pleasant foretaste of what awaits us. I suppose women like to be flurried. Sophy, I beg you won't cry at least ;—make the most of it, if you must, but spare your tears."

"Oh, mamma, how long they are ! What can it be ?" cried Sophy, wringing her hands. Sophy's distress was far too real, even to hear what Percy said.

"We must look to Zaidee, Elizabeth," said Mrs Vivian. "Poor child, I believe it is all her foreign blood, so excitable, and with such strong feelings—we must do something whenever there is time."

Percy shrugged his shoulders. "There is not a philosopher among us but Peggy, yonder ; see how well she bears up," said Percy ; "and, in good time, here are the hero and the heroine. Lo, they come !"

But even Percy turned with a start to consult the looks of the others when Philip's pale determined face, so singularly changed, and Zaidee's awed and trembling pallor, appeared at the open door. The two advanced solemnly and silently, like leaders of a procession ; Philip holding firm in his own Zaidee's hand, and Zaidee rendering a passive helpless obedience to his guidance, which was very strange to see.

"Mother !" said Philip Vivian as he approached ; and his voice was strange and harsh, and the word came with so much difficulty that he had to repeat it

again. "Mother, a great change has befallen us all. I can say nothing to prepare you—I can only beg you to summon all your courage. Zaidee has had good cause for her grief—poor little Zay ! But I am young, and so is Percy ; we will set out on the world together," continued poor Philip, almost hysterically, and with glistening eyes. "Mother, you do not understand me ; you cannot understand me, I know ; but I—I am no longer heir of the Grange."

Mrs Vivian rose from her seat with a low cry. Her daughters clustered hurriedly about her ; Margaret for the moment forgetting that there was such a person as Mr Powis, who for his part stood at a little distance, with more curiosity than he cared to show.

"It is Zaidee," said Philip, hastily. "All these years, while I have had the credit of it, she has been the true heir of the Grange. Here is the will. But it is my office to see her righted now."

And Philip loosed his hold of Zaidee's hand, and hastened to support his mother. A flush of generous pride and courage supported himself ; but it was very hard once more to realise and recognise this misfortune, as it fell sudden and sharp upon *them*. And Philip's "office" was to support, to protect, and comfort. The old Squire and his arbitrary will could take nothing but house and lands from Philip ; not an atom more of natural right or dignity could be subtracted from the

inalienable possession of the young chivalrous Head of the House. He felt this in his inmost heart, and it defended him like triple mail.

But Philip's mother was moved with very different feelings. "My boy ! my boy !" cried Mrs Vivian, "what do you tell me—a will—the will my poor Percy looked for so long?—and you are disinherited for Zaidee?—that child ! and we have all had her in our heart so long ? Oh Philip, Philip, do not speak to me ! At her age I would have died a hundred times rather than wrong another so !"

"Zay could not help it. Oh, mother, Zaidee is not to blame !" cried Sophy, generously, through her tears.

"Dear mother, look at her. Poor child !" said Elizabeth, her sweet eyes overflowing with pity and grief. "Whatever comes to us, Zaidee will suffer most of all."

"And Zaidee would have died ; Zaidee would have broken her heart, and perished, before she said a word," said Philip, with reproof in his tone ; "but I thank Heaven I am her natural guardian, and right shall be done to her now."

"I wonder who dares speak to me of right," said Mrs Vivian wildly. "Right ! Percy was his father's eldest son—so is Philip. Philip is the heir of the Vivians, the head of the family. You need not speak to me. Do you think I cannot judge ? The Grange is Philip's

birthright, children,—do you all hear ? I will dispute it to the last. Zaidee, do you say ? What is Zaidee compared with my son ? Only a girl, a friendless little orphan, who has known nothing but love and kindness here ; and my brave noble boy—O Philip, Philip, it will break my heart !”

Mrs Vivian threw herself into her chair once more, and sobbed aloud. Elizabeth knelt down before her, and took in her own her mother’s hands. No one spoke. In their youthful respect they all forgot what individual share in the matter they had, and grouped around her silently, the principal sufferer ; while a natural instinct taught them all, that their mother herself had reached the softening point, and would subside to a softer emotion now.

An interval of silence, during which Mrs Vivian struggled with this hysterical sobbing, followed, and then she laid her hand softly on the beautiful head bending at her knee. “Elizabeth, too !” said the mother, “my dear beautiful Elizabeth—a bride—and all this misery to come now ;—and Percy setting out in life—and Margaret,—where is Margaret ? Has she left me at such a time as this ?”

“I am here, mamma,” said Margaret, faintly, from behind her mother’s chair ; for Margaret had just seen Mr Powis edging stealthily towards the door as if in fear.

“ And I was so happy and so thankful for you all,” continued the mother, “ this very day—at table here—where the bread is not broken still—not half an hour ago, Philip ; troubled for nothing but for Zaidee ; thinking you were all so well—so well—almost boasting to myself. God help me ! How can I bear to see you all cast down and brought to poverty ? I could bear anything for myself ; but you, children—you ! ”

“ We will help each other ; we will hold together,” said Percy, eagerly. “ Do not fear, mother ; you have two sons.”

And Mrs Vivian melted into gentler weeping, saying their names as they gathered round her, each pressing closer than the other. Such a wealth of youthful energy, affection, hope, and generous emulation ! She was mistress of the Grange no longer, but so rich a mother still.

Meanwhile Zaidee stood alone, in her solitary misery unconsoled. Tearless and dry were Zaidee’s eyes, and her forehead burned and throbbed over them with such a glow of pain that she almost fancied she must be going mad. Wild flashes of light came and went before her sight ; a wild hum of sound rung in her ears ; her heart leaped in her breast with a strong and rapid pulsation ; her hands were burning hot, as they clasped each other with that involuntary desire to hold by something which assailed her in her solitude.

But Zaidee neither moved nor spoke. When her cousins crowded round their mother, she alone, like a statue, stood still, and made no sign. In a strange haze of other half-discerned words, Mrs Vivian's first bitter exclamation came back upon Zaidee again and again, and she reasoned with her own vexed soul. Should she have died? Almost a sanction seemed to come to this dread experiment, from the outcry of Mrs Vivian's grief. Would it be lawful now to go away and die, to relieve them at once and for ever from such a miserable supplanter? The thought burned in upon Zaidee's brain;—what should she do?

She did what it were well if all would do in the great straits of life. She went away with her noiseless step, alone and silently, to the far-away retirement of her own room. She knelt down upon her little cushion, laid her burning brow upon her father's Bible, and carried her desolate heart to God. She was no philosopher, this poor child. Careful thought and reasoning were unknown to her—she never thought it unlawful to carry one desire or another into that sacred presence, but went with them all, simply and humbly, in the boldness of a child. And Zaidee asked for the immeasurable boon of Death; asked that it might be freely given her from the good hand of God, and, with weeping and passionate sobs of love, prayed

for blessings on them all, name by name—but that she herself might die. The early afternoon darkened over her forgotten loneliness, but neither anger nor bitterness came to the forlorn heart of Zaidee ; she was only heart-broken—very sad.

## CHAPTER XXII.

## WHAT EVERY ONE MUST DO.

“ZAY, Zay ! you are not asleep ?”

“No, Sophy.” Poor Zaidee does not add what she believes, that she will never sleep again.

“Mamma sent me to bring you down stairs ; we did not forget you, Zaidee. *I* have been thinking of you all the time,” said Sophy, putting up her hand to her eyes, which were red, and had wept many tears ; “but Elizabeth said it was best to leave you alone. People might think it was very weak, perhaps,” continued Sophy, with a little relapse into crying, “but we are all so very sad.”

Zaidee, in her despair, writhed under these words as at another blow.

“But everybody knows very well you are not to blame. How could you be to blame ?” said Sophy. “That wicked old Grandfather Vivian never saw you. I am sure he did not care for you more than for Philip. They say we must not call him names,” said Sophy,

clenching her pretty rosy hand ; “ I am sure I cannot help it. If it was good for you, I should not care, but you are as sad as any of us. Oh, Zay, that wicked old man ! ”

“ He is dead,” said Zaidee ; “ he cannot harm any one now. It is only the living who can do harm. If I had died when I was a baby, or before I came to the Grange, Grandfather Vivian’s bad will could not have wronged Philip. I wish I had only died when my mother died.”

“ And I wish you would not speak so, to make things worse,” said Sophy, with a half-petulant sob. “ What good does it do to talk of dying ? You are to come down stairs, Zay—they are all there,—and we are talking of what we are to do.”

“ But Aunt Vivian does not want to see me ; Aunt Vivian cannot bear to look at me, Sophy,” said Zaidee sadly.

“ You must come ; mamma sent me herself. If she was overcome at first, Philip says you must forgive her, Zay,” said Sophy. “ Poor mamma, she was so proud of Philip ! Zaidee, you must come.”

Without the chamber door, Sermonicus, very solemn and disconsolate, sat erect, keeping watch. Sermo, in his wisdom, saw that the climax had arrived, whatever it was ; but why his old ally and dearest friend should forsake his company, Sermo

could not tell, and he was depressed like all the rest. Wistfully inquiring with his eyes what the mysterious cause might be, Sermo descended after the two girls ; but still more bewildered grew Sermo in sight of those youthful footsteps grown so heavy, and the silent clinging together of those young figures—not a word passing between them, each so drooping and downcast. Sermo could make nothing of this strange and sudden change.

Once more within this kindly room, the family rest and haven—once more in this sweet glow of home-like twilight, the curtained windows at one end, the broad cold sky and sweeping clouds looking in through the heavy mullions at the other, the warm central flush of ruddy light from the fire. But no one observes now this full and kindly comfort—no one notices those pretty effects of light and shadow ; common use and custom establish them all in their wonted places ; yet far from the wonted use of fireside discussions is this one which is beginning now.

Not a mind among them which does not tingle still with the sudden blow ; not a heart that is not wistful and uneasy, ready to groan over the new and unaccustomed pain, but toiling after a fictitious cheerfulness for the others' sake. Every one thinks "*I* could have borne it gladly, had it been only *me* ;" every one questions, wonders, "What can I do ?" Calamity

has found them singularly unprepared—open at every point of attack, and sensitive in all ; but the first result is a rush together, a silent embracing, and blending into one of all their interests—and a unanimous struggle to throw off the burden, and find modes of exit and deliverance from this family overthrow.

And there sits Mrs Vivian, the fairy godmother of poor Zaidee's fancy, more upright than she ever sat before, playing the tips of her fingers restlessly upon her lips, and leaning upon the arm of her chair. Mrs Vivian's mind is full of conflicting schemes, conflicting feelings ; for the mother has no sooner boldly formed a plan, than she shrinks with sudden humiliation, thinking of her children. If they could but be kept out of the necessary hardships—but, alas ! it is herself rather in her elder age that must be kept out, whereas the heat and burden of the day remains for them. But Mrs Vivian is unwilling to compromise a dignity—unwilling to touch, with so much as a finger-point, a single sensitive youthful feeling ; yet ever comes back to the certain starting-point, something must be done ; and she is so anxious, too, to do something. The failure of all her endeavours for a feasible project fills her with vexation, yet nothing will come to unite what she would do with what she must.

And here is Zaidee — poor woe-begone, forlorn

child, stealing in the dark behind her chair. "Mother," said Philip in a warning under-tone—but his mother's own heart had already warned her. She rose and drew the orphan to her usual place at her own side.

"Zaidee," said Mrs Vivian, holding both Zaidee's hands in her own, and folding them over each other with tremulous agitation—"they tell me I said something very cruel to-day. Poor child, you do not think I ever meant to blame you—you whom I have brought up since you were almost a baby? But, Zaidee, it was dreadful to think of Philip. I never grudged anything to you; but Philip was the heir, the head of the Vivians, and my own noble boy!"

Zaidee made no answer, except by a shudder which crept over all her frame, slow and violent—a kind of bodily earthquake—and continued to look up intently into the speaker's face.

"I have known this as his birthright all his life," continued Mrs Vivian rapidly, looking down upon Zaidee's hands, and plaiting them over each other. "I have never thought but of the natural succession, that he should hold his father's place; and it was a great shock to me—and in the shock I spoke rashly. You will never think again of what I said—for Philip

and the Grange have always been one to me, Zaidee—I never thought of them apart."

"Then you will speak for me, Aunt Vivian?" said Zaidee eagerly, but in the very low tone of deep emotion. "What can I do with it all?—it was never meant for me. I am only a woman—I never can be anything but a woman; and I would be so proud—oh, Aunt Vivian!—instead of breaking my heart as I do now, I would be Zaidee at home again, so proud and happy, if you would only ask Philip to let me burn that paper on his birthday, that no one may ever know that it was possible to wrong him. It is not righting me, Philip—oh, you cannot think so—it is wrong to me, and to us all; for Philip, Aunt Vivian—Philip is the true heir."

Aunt Vivian shook her head mournfully. The true heir—yes, so he was, by all the rights of natural justice, of usage, and ordinary inheritance; but Philip's mother, still more than his estate, regarded his honour. Her eye wandered to that fatal bit of paper spread open upon the table—that weighty document which Philip would not trust out of the range of his own hand, and the vigilance of his own eye; and Mrs Vivian sighed drearily, and shook her head once more.

"Oh, Aunt Vivian, speak for me!" cried Zaidee. "Philip is proud, but you know better. He would

not kill me with his own hand, but it will be as bad. I will kill myself rather than have any one say that the Grange is mine!"

And Zaidee suddenly started up with passion in her eyes, and all her tears dried in a moment. She could not distinguish what the remonstrances were which rose around her ; she only understood a vague outcry of expostulation and reproof, in which every one joined save Sophy, who alone, scared and horror-stricken, sat silently weeping, and looking up with mute looks of appeal into Zaidee's face. But a gentle arm stole round the excited girl. Elizabeth, mild and self-possessed—a little paler than usual, but with her sweet womanly composure unbroken—drew her young cousin to her own side—subdued her outburst of passion, Zaidee could not tell how—melted her once more into quiet weeping—and, keeping round her the kind enclosing arm which seemed to restrain Zaidee's very heart, brought her back to the family circle. They all owned the calming influence of Elizabeth, and gathered close again in their household deliberations, forgetting this agitating episode, and resuming the council where it had been broken off.

"I hope every one understands," said Philip, with the slightest possible tremor in his voice, "that though we are all grieved for Zaidee, this is a subject which must never be mentioned again among us.

Every one must perceive at once my duty to Zaidee, and I trust no one doubts that I will do it."

A flush at once of manly pride and youthful modesty—the rising blood of the brave young heart which entered thus upon its generous vocation as family head—covered Philip Vivian's face. His mother and sisters looked at him proudly with tears in their eyes. Philip had been but a youth, easy in his undisputed right, and owning all the family subordinations—himself no head, but only a member of the loving circle, when this morning rose. Now, and suddenly, Philip was a man—deciding for himself with a man's steadiness, if still with a youth's rash and rapid promptitude—and with a man's loving and solicitous forethought looking anxiously into the future for them all. Little wonder that Mrs Vivian covered her eyes with her hand, and again in her heart blessed "my noble boy!"

"You remember the appointment in India that Sir Francis Vivian offered to get for Percy?" said Philip, speaking rapidly. "Mother, our own feelings must not stand in the way. If it is still to be had, I will accept it. I have made up my mind; and Percy can still go to London. After the first year, I will surely be able to help him through his studies. This misfortune can have no effect on Elizabeth; and for yourself, mother, you are Zaidee's natural guardian. I think

you should remain with Margaret and Sophy at home. I mean," said Philip, faltering as he cast a wistful glance round the familiar room—"I mean, here, in the Grange."

"I cannot, Philip, I cannot!" exclaimed Mrs Vivian. "Stay here, in my own house, after it becomes the property of another heir—after you are banished from it, and all my children scattered? I cannot, Philip. Anything else—anything else! But I cannot stay in the Grange, when it is neither yours nor mine."

"We could go to London and be near Percy," said Margaret. Margaret was very pale, and her eyes looked heavy. Altogether, a startled, chilled expression, full of apprehension and dread, which she would not whisper to herself, but which appalled her with her first suspicions of human truth and trustworthiness, was upon Margaret Vivian's face. And they all perceived it—all had a perception of its cause, but no one dared to speak of sympathy to the maidenly reserve which would rather die than be pitied on such a score.

"It would not be so very expensive living in London; they say people may live as they like there. I should like that, mamma," said Sophy; "and then, if we must lose Philip, we should at least have Percy still."

Mrs Vivian made no answer for some time; and when she did speak, it was rather her thoughts break-

ing forth and becoming audible than words addressed to her little audience. “And Colonel Morton—and your Uncle Blundell—and all our friends who were to be here.—Colonel Morton is a worldly man.—Heaven help us! What if we have greater misfortunes in store? Elizabeth, my dear love, what will you do?”

Elizabeth answered readily in her most tranquil voice: “I will write to Bernard to-night, mother; and Colonel Morton is Philip’s guardian, and ought to know. If anything is changed by this, I will say it has happened well; but I fear no change.”

The bride did not blush now. Her beautiful cheek rather paled a little, but her composure was unchanged. Elizabeth, who never spoke of such a thing as love, nor knew what high-flown expressions meant, knew—a better satisfaction—how surely a true heart might be trusted, and feared no evil. Like Faith herself in her lofty humility, Elizabeth always trusted and never feared; the others took confidence from her very look, there was so strange a power in its repose.

But Zaidee, with Elizabeth’s arm round her—subdued and broken down, crouching in her corner, and weeping out her tears—Zaidee had no part in the family consultations,—Zaidee was alone.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

## A NEW IDEA.

YET Zaidee, helpless and without a word, listened to all they said. They fancied her absorbed in her own grieving, and inattentive to their deliberations. They forgot that her keen senses were never so much absorbed as to lose sight of anything that passed before her; and they were too much occupied themselves to think how every word and look penetrated the heart of this poor child, who was the innocent occasion of all their care. Always quick to perceive the changes of these beloved faces, Zaidee read, as in a book, the chivalrous resolve of Philip, the impatient eagerness of Percy, the dreadful doubt and trembling which struck poor Margaret like a palsy. Through her tears looking at them all, she interpreted every glance aright; but Zaidee's words were all spent and exhausted. Elizabeth's arm round her controlled her strangely from any renewed outburst of passion or entreaty. She had nothing more to say. By-and-by the family council broke up. They dis-

persed to write letters. Philip, Elizabeth, and their mother, had each to communicate this unlooked-for change to some one ; and they went to their separate apartments heavily, as if the act of telling it consummated their sudden fate.

“ Never mind, Sophy,” said Percy, with the ghost of his former smile trembling on his lip, “ some great fortune will come to us yet. Never fear. Philip will marry a Begum ; or some great lady will lay hold of me. Never fear.”

But Sophy only sat still on her stool by the fireside, and cried. Margaret went wistfully to that great mullioned window, where the darkening sky of night looked in, and from which all those solitary bleak lines of road stretched away under a faint gleam of early moonlight into the horizon before her eyes ; while Percy himself, afraid to compromise his manhood by a sympathetic weakness, left the room hurriedly for some occupation of his own. Unnoticed in the darkness, Zaidee escaped after him, her cheeks burning, her heart throbbing. A new chance opened to Zaidee. She was still but a child, and, fearless in her innocence, never dreamt of evil interpretation to her guileless thoughts. With something like renewed hope she hurried once more to her own apartment, to think over this possibility which appeared before her tearful eyes. She was no reasoner, poor child ; and to think over, with her

meant to muse upon and realise in fancy the thought presented suddenly in a flash of inspiration to her rapid mind. Breathless and greatly agitated, much unlike a person gravely thinking over a reasonable project, Zaidee idled away a few troubled moments in her own room. Then dashing away her tears with a hasty hand, hearing her heart beat loud in her ears, and feeling all her pulses throb with terror and excitement, she descended once more with the flying step of her old use and wont. The drawing-room was still dark, and still Sophy sat disconsolate by the bright hearth, and Margaret stood wistfully gazing out from the window. Zaidee's errand was not to the drawing-room ; she passed through it hastily to the library-door.

With one dim light burning on the table—with the fire dying on the hearth, the curtains undrawn, and that black, pale, wintry sky looking in again like a watchful spirit—very chill and gloomy was the aspect of this room. Its dark piles of books withdrawing into the shadow, its black unlighted corners, and that old vacant easy-chair, where Zaidee could almost fancy Grandfather Vivian, triumphant in successful malice, glorying over the desolation he had made. But to look upon that manly youthful face, glowing with new necessities and new powers, full of generous ardour and an old-world knightly devotion, was enough to defeat the malice of any Satan. If Philip had lost the Grange, he had found better gifts to make compensation. As

for Zaidee, catching only with her quick glance how he sat there at the table writing, with the light of the lamp full upon his face, she did not venture to look at Philip, but, gliding in with her silent rapid footstep, came unobserved to his side.

“Zaidee!—is it you?” Philip’s nerves were somewhat excited; so that, looking up in the half light, and seeing suddenly this figure beside him, he was considerably startled, and left a trace of his start on the page before him, in shape of a great blot.

“Philip”—Zaidee was breathless with agitated haste—“Philip, Percy says you may marry a rich lady. You will not let me burn that paper. Philip, will you marry me?”

Philip Vivian’s face flushed crimson; but, in her earnest innocence, Zaidee, unblushing, stood before him, her eyes lifted to his, her whole soul in her intent and steady look. In most cases there is something sufficiently embarrassing in the commonest proposal of this kind; but Philip, in the present strange reversal of ordinary wooing, faltered under Zaidee’s grave and resolute eyes like a timid girl—faltered, blushed, could find no words to answer her. But no blush came to the dark pale face of Zaidee, lighted up with the gleaming anxiety of those eyes. No more than of some abstract creature did Zaidee think of herself—herself had no share in this proposed transaction; only a last hope, a desperate expedient for restoring the Grange

to Philip, was this bold proposal ; and sincere and single-minded, the child in her defended the budding woman. Zaidee knew no shame.

To Philip Vivian the moment of silence seemed an hour. "Zaidee," he stammered, his embarrassment taking almost the aspect of anger, "a woman never asks this question of a man."

Then for the first time a flush stole over Zaidee's face. "Twice to-day," she said, drooping her head and folding her hands like a reproved child—"twice to-day you have called me unwomanly, Philip—but I cannot help it ; it is not my fault—nothing is my fault, though I am so miserable. But you could send me away," she continued, looking up with renewed supplication : "I do not care where you send me to—I could go away. Philip, will you answer me ?"

Philip turned away his head : for the moment, with a young man's sensitive pride, he only saw how absurd his position was, with his little cousin standing here by his side, urging this extraordinary proposal upon him. He felt ridiculously embarrassed and ashamed ; and, in the second place, he felt impatient and angry. "I have no answer to give," said Philip hastily ; "and I must beg you to leave me, Zaidee. Go to my sisters —go to Elizabeth, and do not tell her what strange things you have been saying. Never mention this to any one. I suppose you are too young to know," said Philip, very red and much embarrassed still ; "yet

one always expects a girl to have some perception. Zaidee, go."

Zaidee went, but not to Elizabeth. The poor girl in her solitude strayed out to the dark, to the windy elevated fore-court which lay between the moat and the door of the Grange. The trees bent and swayed with their long bare branches before the wild Cheshire wind. Fresh and strong this gale blew upon her flushed and heated face, catching her hair out of the braid, as it caught these stray leaves in the corners where last night's gale had left them ; and the clouds rushed at a flying pace along the sky, keeping strange time to the dreary rustling among the trees. Zaidee drew a long breath, and opened her arms with a weary gesture to the fresh assaulting wind. Her heart was *sore*—wounded for the first time, and aching with poignant injury and shame ;—shame, for now she began to think of what she had done, and to perceive why Philip thought her unwomanly. The child had almost died in Zaidee's breast at that moment, to give place to the premature woman ; but her original grief stepped in once more, overpowering all slighter emotions. No expedient served her ; every hope had failed—and she was indeed the supplanter of her cousin, the usurper of Philip's birthright and Philip's ancestral home.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

## DELAY.

“HE said I was not to tell Elizabeth. If it was so very wrong, they ought to know ; they should not think me better than I am,” said Zaidee in her thoughts, as she stood facing the night wind without the door of the Grange. “I *will* tell Elizabeth—I will tell Aunt Vivian ; and then”—

And then——. What should follow did not appear ; but something had softened once more the dull despair in Zaidee’s eye. Again there was a gleam of light in her face—a wavering illumination of reverie and musing. Some project or other, perhaps as wild as her last hope, but at least sufficient to give temporary comfort and animation, had risen again in Zaidee’s mind. She turned her face homewards once more. There were lights now in the forsaken, disconsolate drawing-room, where Margaret, composing herself by an effort, sat in melancholy state by the table alone. Margaret was professedly reading, but you might

have watched for hours before you saw her turn a page.

Zaidee directed her steps this time towards the bower of the household—that pretty bright “young ladies’ room,” which with all its decorations—those home adornments which made home so lovely—preserved still a glimmer of brightness where everything else was dark. Mrs Vivian and Elizabeth were seated here together by the fire, and nothing neglected or out of order proclaimed the calamity which had come upon the house. The ordinary use and wont—the daily composure and quietness which these few hours had interrupted more violently than years of common life could have done, startled Zaidee in her excitement as she crossed the threshold. She almost persuaded herself that the dreary change which had passed over everything else was but a dream. But to tell her own guiltiness and shame, in the matter of her proposal to Philip, was a sufficiently hard task to claim all her attention now. Pale and breathless with the boldness of terror, Zaidee told her tale—what she had done ; and stood before her judges, appalled at her own grievous misdemeanour, waiting to hear her doom.

But Aunt Vivian only kissed the culprit, and drew her handkerchief across her own eyes ; while Elizabeth, with a blush and smile, contracted her beautiful brows the slightest in the world, as she whispered, “Zaidee,

never do it again." Zaidee had no mind ever to do it again ; but she was comforted to find no thunderbolt of condemnation descend upon her, after all.

"Mamma, will you come and have some tea ?" said Sophy, looking in with a disconsolate face. Sophy could still drown all *her* grievances in a good fit of crying ; and her heart was all the easier that her eyes were red. They followed her silently once more into the family room. They were all weary and languid with the emotion of the morning ; they had no heart for further consultation—further discussions or arrangements. The fire was low and the lights few, for Margaret was fanciful in her grief ; but no one had the heart to brighten this comparative gloom. Far apart and silent, the family, who were wont to cluster so lovingly together, had thrown themselves into corners of sofas and separate unused chairs. A faint murmur of conversation, question and answer, only made the quiet heavier. The drawing-room of the Grange had never looked so dreary since Squire Percy died.

In the window lay a little heap of Zaidee's work. With a faint perception of the girl's meaning in labouring at these coarse and homely household necessities, Mrs Vivian gathered them up to put them away. "This was never work for you, Zaidee," said the old lady. Zaidee looked up at her with tears in her eyes,

but made no answer, though her look followed Mrs Vivian's movements with a mournful regret, strangely different from her former passion. Mrs Vivian continued to move about with melancholy activity, while all the rest sat quiet round her. Percy, who was of the irritable genus, and had nerves easily annoyed, broke out in uncontrollable impatience at last.

“If you would but sit down, mother!” exclaimed Percy. “We are not to leave the Grange to-morrow, are we?—and you are not preparing for a funeral or some great solemnity? There is surely no need for all this dreary putting away.”

Mrs Vivian had been “setting things to rights,” as that strange operation which conveys familiar matters out of the way to put them “in their proper place” is called. All the pretty tools of the sisters—the materials of their graceful industry—she had begun to arrange in solemn order, and shut up in drawer and work-box; and she had even lifted some books, naturalised in the drawing-room, to carry them off to their proper position in the library. At Percy’s remonstrance his mother suddenly stopped—said, with a long sigh, “that is true”—and retreated drearily into the nearest vacant chair. It was a chair in a corner quite apart and separate: they were all seated so.

“I have written to most of the people, Philip,” said Mrs Vivian, after another long pause; and very

strangely Mrs Vivian's voice rang through the unusual silence of the room. Philip made no answer. There seemed some spell upon them all ; for every one tried to find something to say, and no one could succeed.

When suddenly Zaidee rose, and hovered with a blush and hesitation between her aunt and Philip. "Will you do this for me, then ?" broke forth Zaidee abruptly. "If you will only do this for me, I will ask nothing more. Don't tell any one yet. There is surely no need to tell any one. Let everything go on till Philip's birthday. Aunt Vivian, I will never ask anything else, if you will do this for me. You can tell the people if you will, on Philip's birthday."

"But why delay till then, Zaidee ?" said Mrs Vivian. "It is hard to do, and it had better be done soon."

"No, no," said Philip hastily ; "we have held a false position too long ; let us be done with it now."

"I will never ask anything again," pleaded Zaidee — "never all my life, Aunt Vivian. I will never trouble you again, if you will but do this for me now."

And Percy, who had been whispering with Elizabeth, interposed with a gleam of mischief in his eye. "If Philip will neither take the estate, nor marry

Zaidee, nor do anything she wants, I think, mother, at least he has no excuse for refusing so modest a request as this."

Philip, who was grievously ashamed of Zaidee's proposal, and dreaded nothing so much as a mention of it, shrank back in instant confusion. She, who did not quite know why her cousin should be so mightily ashamed, stood her ground ; and Zaidee triumphed. The letter which Mrs Vivian had written to Colonel Morton, and Elizabeth's communication to her betrothed, were the only ones sent to-night ; and it was with a sigh, half of satisfaction, half of disappointment, that Mrs Vivian committed her other letters to the flames, and sat by, absorbed in thought, while they fell to ashes at her feet. If the record of this day could but be destroyed as easily ! " And I might have burnt it, and no one ever have known," said Zaidee, with bitter self-reproach. But no burning of that fatal bit of paper, though the Grange itself made the bonfire, could suffice to destroy it now. Grandfather Vivian's will was in Philip's keeping, and Philip's proud young honour was vowed to establish it. The rights which were rights this morning, could never be rescued back again from the change which had come upon them ; for while memory lasted, every Vivian here would remember this day.

" Zaidee has thought of something—something may

happen still before Philip's birthday." This was Sophy's secret comment. No one else made any comment at all, but they went to their rest heavy and wearily, to sleep or not to sleep, as their case was.

## CHAPTER XXV.

## SCHEMES.

ZAIDEE has indeed thought of something. What is this the girl is about in her little turret-chamber, where the wintry light breaks in, in many coloured patches, and the wild wind without, rushes, as if to force admittance, against the casement ? Not a very elevated or lofty task, but her whole sincere soul is in Zaidee's face.

It is only an old copy-book, spread upon the window-sill before her ; and work for which she has less taste could scarcely be than this doleful writing of copies, which she pursues with silent and absorbed earnestness. Truth to tell, with no great success either ; for still poor Zaidee's straight lines will not be straight, and these capital letters limp woefully, heading the lessening file of words, which come to such a dwarfish stature before they reach the end of the line. When the page is finished, it is hard to see any improvement ; and, shaking her head

sadly over it with a dreary sigh, Zaidee begins again.

The chamber door is closed for hours—closed upon Sophy, who is offended, and wonders what it means—wonders if Zaidee is changed in heart by her new position—and goes away heavier than ever in her own spirit ;—closed upon Sermo, too, who sits without, now and then appealing pathetically with paw and voice. But Zaidee has no leisure for Sermonicus, and he also must go away, much wondering, to find another companion ; while hour after hour—alas, such lengthy, weary, slow-paced hours !—Zaidee, faithful to her copy-lines, bends over her book and writes, till mere fatigue overcomes the rising fervour of visible improvement, and the new heiress of the Grange rises from her labour at last.

It is only to put on hastily her plain brown straw bonnet, with its blue ribbon, and to draw her little cloak over her shoulders. Very sombre in colour is the dress of Zaidee—not much unlike that brown girlish complexion of hers, through which you can scarcely prophesy what kind of womanhood may bloom. Sermo, poor fellow, has only now retired, in offended dignity, to his place by Mrs Vivian's footstool ; but Zaidee does not care to have Sermo with her in her present expedition. The rain is sweeping white across the country, from which every sign of life seems to

have been driven by the blast. The sandy path leading to Briarford trickles all over in little channels with streamlets of the rain ; and the wind, though somewhat cowed, does no discredit to the month or to the locality. There is little out of doors to tempt the wayfarer ; but Zaidee, much indifferent to the weather, passes through it undismayed, turning her solitary rapid footsteps towards the little house, with its scrubby flower-plots and green shutters, the Curate's cottage, where Angelina has her bower.

A very shady and not over-cheerful apartment to-day is the bower of Angelina. This young lady has not learned yet the charm of the fireside ; and instead of the fireside, the Curate's wife sits by the window with her poetry book, looking out upon the dreary rain, upon those poor drenched dahlias and hollyhocks in her little garden, and upon the broken hedge and rushy watery field which lies without. Angelina, to tell the truth, is as dull to-day as the dullest young lady who has no "resources." A needle and a thread, if she had skill to use them, would be unspeakable comfort to this mistaken lover of the Muses ; but Angelina has a lofty disdain of all the pretty labours of ladylike leisure, and has not learned yet the housewifely necessities which by-and-by will compel her to occupation. The poetry book, however, proves a very poor substitute for the woman's work which Angelina scorns ;

and she looks out disconsolately over her drenched flower-plot—looks in with a dreary glance to the dim room shadowed with its green curtains—wonders if anybody will call—and thinks, with a tear rising in her eye, of mamma and her little sisters, and all the needful, natural subordination from which she was so proud to escape into the dignified freedom of a married lady—a clergyman's wife. But, however, here she is now, uncommanded and insubordinate—no one to please but the indulgent Curate shut up in his study, who may shrug his shoulders sometimes, but never grumbles in comprehensible words. So the Curate's wife once more draws herself up, and bends her face between her drooping curls over her book of poetry—a production not much more cheerful to look upon than the dreary Cheshire flat before her, under this white blast of November rain.

When suddenly there flashes upon her disconsolate reverie the illumination of Zaidee's face. Zaidee's face has been wetted by rain-drops, and flushed with striving against the wind, but is glowing bright with intention and purpose, such as never fell to Angelina's lot. Looking forth with vague wonder, the Curate's wife almost forgets to smile a recognition of her welcome visitor. What can Zaidee want? Mrs Green marvels—for no one can doubt that Zaidee wants something. Meanwhile the girl herself, without so

much as observing that there is any one at the window, presses forward to the door and enters, the fringes of the cloak—alas the day!—dripping upon the light-coloured damask which covers Mrs Green's chairs, and leaving a visible print upon the sofa as she brushes by.

“How wet you are!” cried Angelina, springing up to unfasten the cloak, lest Zaidee, careless of the damask, should throw herself, fringes and all, into the easy-chair, the glory of the room. “Dear Zaidee, did you come all this way through the rain to see me?”

“No,” said Zaidee, with unhesitating and simple sincerity. “But I ought to say Yes,” she added immediately. “I came to speak to you about something. The strings are wet—never mind the cloak. Are you sure Mr Green is busy, and no one will come here but you?”

“I *must* mind the cloak,” said Mrs Green, not quite so sincere as Zaidee; “you will catch cold; and so shall I, I believe, it is so very wet. I will ring, and send it away”—and Angelina held the unfortunate garment at arm's length, and went daintily towards the bell—“and then we shall be quite alone.”

Zaidee had not thrown herself within the magnificent arms of the easy-chair. She stood before the fire, holding her bonnet in one hand, her face a little downcast, her other arm hanging listlessly by her side. The

Curate's wife shivered slightly, and complained how cold it was ; but Mrs Green took her chill, not from the weather, but from the look of Zaidee, so absorbed and self-contained, and full of incomprehensible energy and intention. Zaidee was at all times very unconscious of being looked at—she was more so than ever now.

Mrs Green, full of expectation, sat down in the easy-chair. Zaidee stood still, full of her own thoughts, before the fire. The cloak had been removed, the door was closed—they were alone.

“ I want you to tell me,” said Zaidee hurriedly, “ if you have ever found that girl yet for the nursery governess ; for, if you have not, I know one that would like to go.”

“ What girl ? ” Her visitor's abruptness confused Mrs Green, who was never over-quick of comprehension.

“ You told me—you remember ? ” said Zaidee, with a slight gesture of impatience, “ about the young lady who was to be married, and had written to you. Have you found the governess yet ? ”

“ No, indeed, Zaidee,” said Angelina eagerly. “ How strange you should come to speak of that ; for I have just had another letter from Charlotte this morning.”

“ And what does she say ? ”

Mrs Green fortunately did not pause to wonder at her visitor's strange and anxious interest, or Zaidee might have been moved to some greater demonstration of impatience ; for Zaidee, alas ! was only a very fallible human girl, and knew she might be arbitrary with this sentimental Angelina almost to any extent she chose.

"She says, poor thing, that she can't be married till some one comes to take charge of the children," said the Curate's wife. "There are six of them, Zaidee ; no wonder she is anxious to get away. It is a delightful task, no doubt ; but then one's own little brothers and sisters are hard to manage sometimes. And you think you know some one ? Shall I go to see her ? What shall I do ?"

"I want you to write now. Pray, if you please, do this for me," said Zaidee, trembling slightly. "I want you to lose no time : here is your blotting-book. I will never ask you anything again, if you will do this now for me."

Mrs Green could not explain why she too trembled and was frightened when Zaidee thrust a pen into her hand, and stood over her with an excited face ; but this strange girl had never been so peremptory and despotic before. Her friend faltered, but could not refuse to obey.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

## A LETTER.

“WHAT shall I say?” asked Mrs Green, holding the pen suspended in her hand, and looking up with a troubled, timid eye. She had wondered at Zaidee many a time; but Angelina, to tell the truth, was now a little afraid.

“You know whether you were great friends,” said Zaidee impatiently. “If you were, you should say ‘Dear Charlotte,’ I suppose.”

“Oh, I assure you, I need no instruction how to begin,” said Mrs Green, with considerable offence; saying which, in a handwriting which could not have been distinguished from Miss Disbrowe’s own, or from the handwriting of any of all Mrs Green’s female correspondents, so exactly similar was its running angular lines to theirs, Mrs Green began—

“My dearest Charlotte”—

(“I thought you were not very great friends,” said

Zaidee, in astonishment. Angelina's rapid pen ran on)—

“I cannot tell you how much delighted I am with what you tell me of your prospects. May you be happy, my sweet friend! for, alas! so bright a lot does not fall to all; and I, who have now experience in life, know better than you can do, how bare it is of all those blessings we expect when we are girls. I know it becomes us all to be thankful and submissive, and I hope I fulfil my duty and try to be so; but I do congratulate you, dearest Charlotte, on your approaching union with the first object of your unwithered affections—the man of your heart!”—

Angelina paused—and so did Zaidee, out of breath. Zaidee's interest was caught for the moment into another channel. She looked up anxiously in her friend's face. “Do you mean you are not happy?” said Zaidee wistfully; for since she came to know what unhappiness was, a great pity had risen in Zaidee's heart. “And Mr Green—he is so good a man, too. I like him myself.”

“I wonder what you mean, Zaidee,” cried the Curate's wife in alarm. “I am sure I have not said a single word of Mr Green. I am quite sure I did not mean anything—and he will come in and see it, and think I am complaining of him. And it is all your fault, Zaidee Vivian. Oh, what shall I do?”

"You are not to put it away. Don't, if you please," said Zaidee. "Tell the young lady about the governess, and I will send it away myself."

After a pause of faltering indecision, Mrs Green took her pen once more. "But I know nothing of this governess—you have not even told me her name—I can't tell if she will suit or not. Pray, Zaidee, be content, and leave me till I can write by myself; it flurries me so, to have you here."

"Say she can read," said Zaidee hurriedly, without at all heeding this remonstrance, "and write, but not very well; and can work at her needle too, though not like Margaret or Elizabeth; and I would be content to do anything," continued the girl, unconsciously appearing in the first person, as her face reddened with emotion and the tears came to her eyes. "I would serve the children, and teach them all I could, and work at what the lady wanted, and be very quiet and humble, and never angry; and I do not want any money—only to let me go into their house into London—and keep me there."

"Zaidee, you!" Mrs Green's pen fell from her hand in the pause of utter dismayed astonishment which followed Zaidee's speech.

"Yes, it is me," said Zaidee. "I cannot stay at home any more. I must go away somewhere, and you will do me good if you will send me there. No one

is to know. I want to go where no one can find me again. I want to go away for ever and ever. You need not cry, though it is very kind of you ; for I should do a great wrong if I did not go away. Now that you know it is me," continued Zaidee, suddenly sitting down on a stool by the fire, with a sigh of weariness, "you can say yourself what I am able to do."

Pale with fright and agitation, the Curate's wife sat looking at her, as she turned with a strange worn-out indifference to gaze into the fire. Mrs Green waited long for Zaidee looking round again, that she might catch her eye ; but Zaidee never looked round. She seemed to have completed her revelation, and sat waiting passive and absorbed till her commands were obeyed.

"But I dare not do it, Zaidee," cried poor Angelina at last, almost hysterically,—"I dare not for my life. I must tell Mr Green and Mrs Vivian first, and hear what they say. I could not help you to go away secretly ; it would be a sin. Oh, Zaidee, surely you cannot mean it ! They are so kind to you at the Grange. Why would you go away ?"

Zaidee rose hurriedly. "Do you know the pool in the hollow at the foot of Briarford Hill ?" she asked with great gravity, but almost in a whisper. "If you tell Aunt Vivian and Mr Green, and any one tries to keep me

here, I will go to the water yonder and die ; for I am in earnest—I am not deceiving. Mind, no one shall hinder me. If you will not help me to go away, I have only the pool left—nothing more.”

The Curate’s wife was stayed in her scream of horror by Zaidee’s gesture. “It is a dreadful sin—a dreadful sin,” cried Mrs Green, trembling over all her frame.

“I do not know—I cannot be sure of that,” said Zaidee, speaking quick and with a bewildered face. “I think of it till my head aches, but I can never tell. It would be for *them*—not for myself, but for them ; and nothing that was done for them could be so great a sin.”

“Will you ask Mr Green—he could talk to you ?” said Angelina, in great distress. “I cannot say anything in such a dreadful matter, Zaidee. I am older than you, but I do not know very much. I—I dare not do anything. Oh, pity on us ! What can I do ?” And fairly overcome by horror and perplexity, poor Angelina, quite unprepared for such a strait, burst into tears.

But there were no tears in Zaidee’s shining eyes. She put her hand upon her friend’s arm, and Angelina looked up from her weeping. “Tell the young lady I will go. You will make me happy—you will save my life,” said Zaidee. “Write what I can do—say I

will do anything, if they will let me come. You cannot change me, but you will make me happy if you write."

"Then let me ask Mr Green first?" sobbed the victim of Zaidee's despotism.

Zaidee withdrew her hand. "If you please," she answered with solemn composure; "but I have told you then what I must do."

"Oh, Zaidee, never say that—never think of that," cried Angelina, with a shiver of terror. "I will do anything to put that dreadful thought out of your mind. Yes, I will—I will, indeed, whatever you like, Zaidee. Tell me what to say."

It was some time before a letter could be produced which satisfied Zaidee; but it was concluded at last. She herself had relapsed into her former quietness, but the Curate's wife trembled with agitation, embarrassment, and terror. "What shall I say to Mr Green? What would Mr Green say to me, if he knew what I had done?" mourned Angelina, who had at heart a devout belief in her husband, and respect for him. But the thing was done, and Zaidee sat before her, looking into the fire, with her face so pale, her air so self-occupied and resolute, her simple girlish sincerity so visible through all, that Angelina's perceptions were quickened into clearer insight than their wont. "She could do it—she would do anything she had

made up her mind to," concluded Mrs Green, looking on, awe-stricken and afraid ; for there was no possibility of doubting that Zaidee had made up her mind.

She went away by-and-by, pacing with her long quick dreamy steps along the road—the letter in her bosom, and the purpose firm in her heart. Poor desolate heart—it throbbed so high with its wild romance of love ; for Zaidee's youth had been nourished with dreams, and inspired with the breath of those great heroisms which teach us the secret of self-sacrifice. Zaidee knew His example, first of all, who gave Himself, an unspeakable ransom, for a world of enemies ; and Zaidee was too young and untaught to think there was sin in withdrawing from the visible ordinance of Providence ; or to remember that she had no right to dispose of the life which God had given her for His will, and not for her own.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

## PREPARATIONS.

TIME and the hour, which wait for no man, pass on with measured footsteps, and never pause to reckon how this household thinks or feels. The short winter days glide by drearily—the long nights lag out their appointed hours. The great family *fête*, once so joyously anticipated, comes every hour nearer, throwing before it no longer a vision of pleasure, but a shadow of dread. To Philip, who looks forward with nervous impatience, longing to have it over—to Mrs Vivian, who shrinks more than she did at first from the thought of changed friends and lost fortune—to Margaret, who looks for this as the conclusion of her fate, the hour of decision which shall make it apparent whether she has chosen a false heart or a true one, in the first preference of her youth—the day approaches, solemnly important, an era and epoch beyond which life must begin anew. Even to Sophy the secret hope of pleasure—which Sophy cannot quite dissociate from a great

entertainment—seems something guilty and unacknowledgable ; and no one in the Grange can see beyond this eventful day, except Elizabeth, whose faithful bridegroom claims her promise, and gravely smiles at thought of change ; and Percy, whose fortune always was to seek, and who knows no personal dismay. In the mean time, the preparations go on as if nothing had happened—as if Philip's birthday was but the consummation of Philip's natural heirship, and not the last on which he should appear as master of his father's house.

Preparations—everything exactly as it was planned ; but there was no longer any heart in them—no longer any quickening spring of anticipation to make their labours pleasant. Decorously and quiet, preserving their family secret with dignified reserve, the disinherited household went about the necessary arrangements for receiving their invited guests, and celebrating the day of festivity which had become such a day of fate. “ It is still my son's birthday—it is still the day on which the head of the house comes of age,” said Mrs Vivian proudly, but with a quivering lip ; and Philip's heart beat high as he anticipated that first grave duty which fell to him as family head on his own festival. He himself, and no other, must pronounce him disinherited. The office came to him in right of his position ; and never had Philip thought of the

Grange and its lands with half the pride which inspired him now, looking at the inalienable heirship which nature had given him, and which no man could take away.

So rooms were prepared and furniture arranged—the pretty labours of the young ladies' room went on as before—and Sophy owned a thrill of delight in her first glance at the new dress, her mother's present, which was to be worn on that eventful night. Everything proceeded as the family councils had planned. True, the hearts were heavy which had been light, and eyes wandered blankly abroad upon an unknown future—toilsome, uncertain, and poor—which once had seen but the unclouded sunshine of an affluent lot ; but this did not affect the general surface of things, and the circle of preparations proceeded as before.

In one solitary chamber another kind of preparation also proceeded. Zaidee Vivian, solitary and sedulous, stooped for hours over her childish copy-book, earnestly and sincerely bent on this accomplishment of penmanship. Here was a matter in which her rapid mind and undeveloped powers served her nothing ; but never scholar devoted himself to the most dazzling mental achievement, with more conscientious endeavour than Zaidee did to this. And rising from her copy-book, the girl would go to her little wardrobe and turn over her simple garments, and decide for the twentieth time

what she would take. The question rather was, what she *could* take ; for Zaidee knew that she must depart secretly, letting no one know when she went, or leaving the slightest clue to trace her by. These were the most obvious of her preparations ; and other hours of her time were spent in dreams and wonderings over the unknown world and the new lot on which she was about to rush. And if poor Zaidee's dreams were sometimes high-flown and fanciful—if her imagination brightened with thought of incidents and adventures never likely to break upon the humble existence she had chosen, it would be a hard judgment that could condemn Zaidee. There is a stubborn infidelity in youth, which rejects the thought of unhappiness. The saddest young misanthrope in the world has glorious chances in his vision which your happy man of middle age wots not of. In the depths of her heart Zaidee was sad—very sad, desolate, heart-broken ; yet such beautiful hopes came to comfort her—such fair romances rose in her mind—ways and means of coming home again, “some time” when no harm would spring from her home-coming. They were very fallacious, very impossible, these wild fancies, yet they supported her like veritable aids.

And the beautiful bride prepared in *her* retirement for her new life—prepared herself with sweet serious thoughts of duty and right—with schemes of love and

kindness—with purposes of good. A simple woman in all things, Elizabeth did not cease to take pleasure in the external preparations—the pretty wardrobe—the sisterly gifts which she should carry with her to her new home. The family trial, great as it was, could not shake the sweet natural equipoise, the balance of mind and temper, which made her, in her humility, a support and comfort to them all. But this very misfortune brought to Elizabeth a secret and a deeper joy than any less disastrous change could have afforded her. She had it in her power now to help and to uphold ; not only the natural necessity of sympathy and love, but a hundred tender offices—real service and comfort —would now be hers to render. She took the blessing out of the grief with thankfulness, and looked forward, fearing nothing ; but already, with an untold glow of pleasure, feeling how they all clung to her, and how already she was of service to them all.

And Percy, in an overflow of hopes and intentions, prophesies, with a flushing cheek, of better fortune to be won than that which is lost ; and reminds his mother, affectionate and proud, that she has “two sons !” And Philip, with the gravity of manhood on his youthful face, considers deeply what he had best do for the welfare and support of all ; yet cannot doubt that the exertions he is so eager to make will win success and triumph almost as great as those vague

triumphs of hope which Percy prophesies. And Margaret, with flushes of varying colour, and eyes which grow wistful and searching in a real melancholy, believes she labours to prepare herself for certainty of the evil she dreads ; yet is deluded nevertheless, unwittingly, with a tremulous hope. Even Sophy, whose delight in her pretty dress quickens into excitement as the day to wear it draws nigh, secretly prepares too for looking well and enjoying herself on this night of nights. “If it is the last time, one may as well try not to be very unhappy,” says Sophy to herself, with true philosophy ; and, indeed, it is hard to persuade oneself to be very unhappy in prospect of such a festival as this.

And so after their different fashions proceed the preparations of the Vivians of the Grange.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

## MARGARET.

AND Margaret, meanwhile, goes on with that secret labour, the picture which was to surprise Elizabeth as the crowning gift of her bride-time ;—goes sadly on with it, tears coming into her eyes sometimes, and blinding her, as she stands before her little easel. Margaret's ambition is high, if her skill is not extraordinary. In this great effort of hers, she has left her pencil and her water-colours, and boldly taken brush in hand. But Margaret's pride and Margaret's ambition are sadly quenched in those tears. Her great landscape has somewhat lost its interest. The view is a view of Briarfard from the window of the Grange—that familiar view which they all look forth upon every day ; but the far-stretching paths mingle and grow dim as the young painter's eyes fill with moisture, and the tower of Briarfard church loses its outline under the hand which trembles with unlooked-for agitation. Unconsciously Margaret Vivian had lingered upon one

line which threaded her landscape, and touched its bits of foliage with a tenderer hand. Now as she stands contemplating her picture, her eye traces this Woodchurch road with a wistful, imaginative glance ; but Margaret Vivian may look forth upon the road to Woodchurch, morning and evening, for many a lingering day, before she sees the figure she looks for, bending its steps towards the Grange.

At the present moment, another thought has occurred to Margaret, which for the time suffices to steady her hand, and give spirit to her labours. This room where she labours in secret is one of the more modern chambers of the Grange, and Margaret has criticised its light, and complained of its imperfections with the true amateur technicality. In a like spirit, the ordinary arrangements of the apartment have been disturbed ; for, unlike a true workman, Margaret makes much of her tools—is pleased to spread them around her in all directions—and rather likes to see, upon table-cover or carpet, a stain of paint. But this is not the Margaret of a month ago : true and strong feeling has buried many little affectations—real trial has thrust the girlish pensiveness away. Since her new thought struck her, she proceeds with her occupation almost as absorbed and earnest as Zaidee herself could be. Before that, when Margaret dallied, it was from the real listlessness of grief, and all her movements betray her ; all her

caprices and repents, her haste and her lingering, betray a sick heart, ill at ease and troubled, which even this beloved occupation has no power to set at rest.

And Zaidee, who wanders like a ghost through these familiar rooms—who, except in her own little chamber, can never be still for a moment, but tries to cheat her restless heart with motion—Zaidee stands by, looking on. She is not, to her own consciousness, observing her cousin at all. Her own mind, indeed, dwells in its own perpetual maze of thought, and thinks neither of the landscape nor the painter. But Zaidee cannot blind or even dim those vivid perceptions of hers ; and though she does not look, she cannot choose but see.

A sudden desire to have some one's opinion strikes the artist, as she goes back slowly from her picture to observe the effect of those last touches. Looking round, Margaret sees her young cousin. No one feels offended with Zaidee ; but a certain shade of importance has gathered round the household favourite since her secret became known.

“Did you ever see any pictures, Zay ?” asked Margaret, pausing before she asked what Zaidee thought of this.

“No—except in the drawing-room, and at the Vicarage,” said Zaidee. This Cheshire girl had never come in the way of exhibitions, and was a savage in respect to art.

"But these are not pictures—only portraits that you have seen," said the amateur. "I will tell you, Zaidee. If this were well done, I think perhaps it might be exhibited ; and if I did another better, *that* might be sold. I shall never leave my mother," said Margaret, with a momentary faltering ; "and if we went to London, I might become an artist, and help them all. Zaidee, look. I know you don't understand about pictures—but tell me what you think of this."

Zaidee looked at it doubtfully—so did Margaret. Margaret had learned to take rather a disparaging view of herself and all her doings within these few weeks ; and, with a painful humility and distrust, which were very sincere if they were not very true, she waited for Zaidee's judgment as anxiously as if Zaidee could have been a judge.

"I think it is very like Briarfورد," said Zaidee at last, slowly ; "but I don't know what kind of day it is—it is not like—"

Margaret threw down her brush abruptly, and clapped her hands. "I see, I see!" said Margaret. "It is like Briarfورد, but it is not like nature. There now ; don't think I am angry. That is it—that is it!"

"For I never looked out yet, but there was wind

among the trees, and clouds over the sky," said Zaidee, in a deprecating under-tone; "and I never saw the sea look blue, but only tawny, and foamy, and brown; but it is very like Briarfard. When Elizabeth sees it, she will think of home. I should like to have such a picture too."

"You!" Margaret thought it only a girlish compliment, and took no notice of the heavy sigh with which Zaidee concluded her wish. "I wonder how people manage to paint air and wind," proceeded Margaret, disconsolately. "I have seen them as true in a picture as you see them out of doors. It must take great study, I fancy. Oh, I am quite a woman now; I have lost so many years!"

"But you are a beautiful painter, are you not?" asked Zaidee.

Thus put upon her honour, the amateur was slow to respond. She looked again at her canvass. Nothing could be more correct than the form of Briarfard church and the outline of those gable ends, and cottage roofs; and distinct as a map the Woodchurch road traversed Margaret's picture, and other wavy lines of pathway wandered through the scene. Twisted oak-trees, studied from the life, and hedgerows, carefully copied from the real hedgerows, made it authentic; but the painter looked upon it with disenchanted eyes.

Alas ! not even a Cheshire gale could drive those painted clouds along that painted sky—not an equinoctial blast could whirl about those branches. It was Briarford, but it was not nature—a portrait, but no picture—pure paint, every bit of it, and nothing more.

“Zaidee,” said Margaret, confidential and humiliated, as she turned away, “I have all to begin again.”

Zaidee made no answer ; and her cousin went away towards the window, saying to herself once more, “To begin again.” And not only in painting, poor Margaret ! not only in the amusement, the accomplishment which she had hoped to make into an art—to unlearn her youthful liking—to withdraw her fresh young heart from its first tenderness and trust—to learn that bitter lore, which tells of broken faith and ungenerous motive : a hard lesson always. It was doubly hard in the complication of evils. “And I cannot go away like Philip or Percy,” said Margaret to herself, half aloud. “A woman cannot trust to herself ; a woman must always look to others ; and I cannot even work, to put the thought away.”

She stopped, for a sudden revulsion changed her thoughts. Something must have happened to keep her woer from her side. Forsaken !—it was not possible ; and she who could dream of such a

change was the only guilty and ungenerous person. No one else was to be blamed. With a flush of anger at herself, Margaret lifted the pencil which had fallen from her hand, and returned to her picture. Zaidee still stood looking on ; but Zaidee could not comprehend the shy flush of reviving animation—the comforting self-reproach of this returning hope.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

## GOING AWAY.

You cannot call yonder pale light in the eastern sky a sunrise ; you cannot hail this dreary chill, which pierces to the bone, as the sweet breath of morning. Yet it is certain, by the insensible brightening of all the landscape round us, by the gradual emergence of one point after another, rising from the gloom, that another November day has risen upon the world. The grass is crusted with hoar-frost, and the same fairy tinge of whiteness has lighted upon walls, and trees, and houses, as far as you can see. Calmer than usual, a dull overhanging cloud covers the sky, and farmyard sounds of rural awakening come to you over the wide country, with a muffled cadence, subdued out of their sharpness by the subdued atmosphere through which they float.

The only friend of whom she dares take leave stands with Zaidee Vivian now, in a dull dark bit of pathway, leading from the Grange to the Hill of

Briarford. The narrow little road is half hidden with dark bushes of furze, with sharp leafless brambles and stunted hawthorn, and goes up and down with steps of rock and slants of sandy soil, a devious ascent to the higher ground. In a little hollow at the side of this narrow foot-track, you can see the stately head of Sermonicus raised with expanded nostrils to the wind ; and hanging over him is Zaidee, in a speechless burst of grief. Sermo cannot tell what it means. Sermo knows nothing of all this human distress and tribulation ; but, with a wistful melancholy howl, Sermo turns upon his youthful mistress a wondering and compassionate eye. Zaidee is dressed for her journey in the brown undecorated dress which is her everyday equipment, with her little cloak, and her close brown straw bonnet, refreshed with a new ribbon, since that deluge of rain through which she passed in her late visit to Angelina. A bundle, somewhat too large for her, lies on the road at Sermo's feet ; a very little basket is in Zaidee's hand, —and she is going away.

Looking back for the last time to see the Grange—looking round for the last time to take a melancholy farewell of this bleak rock-bound country, with its perpetual gales and cloudy sky ; the heavenliest calm of Italian blue could never charm the soul of Zaidee Vivian like this tumultuous rush of clouds and stormy

vapours, those gleams of laughing sunshine and variable shadow, which keep a perpetual vicissitude of life and motion upon the Cheshire fields. With lingering wistful eyes she turns and looks her last upon this broad and wind-swept scene—hears the trees swaying with a mournful cadence in the cold morning breeze—sees the great cloud over-head breaking up into lesser masses, and drifting hither and thither to every point of the sky—low down and quiet at her feet sees the smock curling from new-lit cottage fires in Briarford—gazes along those solitary lines of road—strains her eyes to see the tawny flow of yonder far-away sea—and, turning once more to Sermo, with a tug at her heart, as though it were rending, weeps—but does not say farewell.

Now, Sermo, go home. Poor faithful hound, go back to the roof that has a right to shelter you. No roof, henceforth, is sacred to Zaidee; no such place as home is in the dreary world she sets her face to. Her heart swells as if it must burst; great drops of dumb and speechless anguish come to Zaidee's eyes. Turning towards the hill for a few, quick, faltering steps, she stumbles on, then looks back once more to wave her hand to the wistful lingering Sermonicus, and bid him go home; and then hastily averting her head, covering her eyes with her hand, pressing hurriedly forward, that she may not be tempted to another fare-

well look, Zaidee Vivian, an orphan, and desolate, sets out upon her journey. Only another flat expanse of Cheshire pastures stretches beyond this little hill ; but to Zaidee it is the world—strange, and pitiless ; the world, unknown, and full of high perils and excitements, which lies upon the other side of Briarford Hill.

Boy, setting forth upon the world with manhood and fortune before you, leaving home is but a troubled joy to you—for there is Hope at your elbow, almost contemptuous of the easy conquests she will find in the unknown, and all the farewells ringing after you are brightened with thoughts of your return. But this poor solitary girl—an unconscious hero—turns her back upon home and all its comforts, with a desolate prayer never to come back again. Zaidee must not store these Uplands in her memory, to recognise them lovingly when she returns. She must not dream of yonder door thrown open, of the family home lighted up with rejoicing, and the family arms extended in loving welcome to hail her home-coming. Zaidee's only desire must be, that they should forget her ; that here, in this familiar country, her very existence should become a forgotten thing ; that no unhappy chance should bring her back where law and authority will compel the child to do her dearest friends a grievous wrong. A dreary wish is this which turns her face so steadily from the world of her acquaintance to

that other world beyond the range of Briarford, and dreary prayers are in Zaidee's heart. Carrying her bundle in her arms, absorbed in her own thoughts, she passes through the dim morning air, through lonely paths and over broken bits of rock, and knots of brushwood. No one has seen her leave the Grange ; no one sees her threading these unfrequented byways. Fall or stumble as she may, there is no one to help her up again ; no one to relieve her of her burden, or direct her steps. Once for all, in this self-decided course of hers, Zaidee has given up all human aids and friendships. Like Una, but without Una's lion—without the dangerous dignity of Una's beauty—not a woman even, only a child—Zaidee Vivian sets out upon the world.

Few people have a clear eye for their own position in its true shape, and Zaidee had no pretensions to be wiser than the many. Her general sense of desolation and solitude could scarcely have been increased, yet the poor child had as slight an apprehension of the real life which she designed for herself as Sermo had ; but her self-dedication was not limited by her fancy. “They will think me ungrateful to go away and never say a word,” said Zaidee, as the tears came silently and dropped upon her hands ; but nobody will ever tell me when I do wrong now ; for I will never see one of them again.”

And Zaidee thought of Aunt Vivian's occasional lectures, of Elizabeth's mild rebuke, of Margaret's momentary pettishness, and put up her hand to her eyes with a long sigh. "Nobody will care for me enough to blame me now," said Zaidee. This was her idea of the life among strangers. But far different was Zaidee's own palpitating heart, and suppressed excitement, from the indifference which she expected to meet. Nothing worse than indifference could the child of so kind a home realise ; she knew of unkindness and oppression only by the name.

A great sum of money, five entire pounds, which Zaidee had asked for, to the great astonishment of Aunt Vivian, supplied her purse. In her bosom was the letter of the Curate's wife. Many a time already had Zaidee looked at that address, and conjured up visions of the Mrs Disbrowe, and the Bedford Place to which it directed her ; but her heart was almost too heavy now to return to those dreams. Now the dim morning sweeps over the Grange, lying quiet and stationary, an immovable landmark upon the eminence at the foot of the hill ; and now the ascending path reveals the young traveller, with her slight dark figure and dreamy rapid pace, against the pale background of sky ; and pausing once to look before her upon the new scene rising yonder, Zaidee plunges into the world with a low cry. The plunge is made with her

first step upon the other side of this rock-ribbed Hill of Briarfard. A moment since, and she was within sight of home ;—now disappeared and gone into the world, a simple martyr, Zaidee Vivian, in that involuntary outcry, bids her former self and her former life farewell.

## C H A P T E R XXX.

MISSING.

“ZAY has gone out, mamma ; I cannot find her,” said Sophy, coming in to the family breakfast-table, where the family were assembled. “Poor Zay ! I think she wants no breakfast to-day.”

The family party was increased by the presence of Elizabeth’s bridegroom, and his father, Colonel Morton, and by Uncle and Aunt Blundell—but was still a family party, and each member of it fully aware how matters stood. This understanding threw a cloud over the little company. Philip, who had attained his present elaborate composure by a great effort, sat at the foot of the long table, anxiously attentive to every one, and trying to wear off with this occupation the excitement he found it impossible to escape. Mrs Vivian, on the contrary, was more reserved and silent than usual ; while Aunt Blundell elevated her erect tall person over the breakfast-table, and kept up a vigilant inspection with her keen grey eyes. Aunt

Blundell, herself a pattern of propriety, was very much afraid that some one of her nephews or nieces might “commit themselves,” and either show an improper amount of emotion at the family catastrophe, or not enough. In especial, Mrs Blundell was concerned for Margaret. No glamour blinded the eyes of the match-making aunt. She had the coolest conviction that “that very handsome young man” would never throw himself away upon the younger daughter of a disinherited house ; and with her vigilant eyes Aunt Blundell sat upon the watch lest Margaret should betray her feelings. Poor Margaret altogether succumbed under this, and sat, drawn back from the table, pale and silent, oppressed by the steady observation which seemed to read her heart.

“Poor Zay ! poor child !” said one after another of the Vivians. Colonel Morton looked round him with an angry stare. Colonel Morton was tall and stout, with eyes looking out, very wide open and full, from a face always suffused with fervid colour—a deep brownish red, of which you might attribute half to the burning Indian suns, and half to a perennial warmth of natural choler. “*Poor Zay !*” said Philip’s guardian, “she is simply the only person in this house to-day who needs no pity. Do you hear me, Philip ? *Poor Zay !* If she thinks herself so, it is slighting Providence. How dare she receive such an inheritance, and

not be thankful ? Mrs Vivian, I cannot, for the life of me, make out what those young fools mean."

" I should think very ill of Zaidee if I could believe she was not grieved to supplant my boy," said Mrs Vivian with spirit.

" Grieved ! Of course she must be ashamed to show her face among us," said Aunt Blundell ; " and quite natural. So many advantages lost, for her ! So many prospects thrown away ! "

Margaret Vivian drew back in greater discomposure than before—Aunt Blundell's eye searched the changes of her face with such relentless scrutiny. Margaret's heart sank within her, for it was scarcely possible to resist the steady conviction which that watchful look expressed.

" Let Zaidee rest, poor child ; I would not disturb her, mother," said Elizabeth. " She will want all her strength to-night."

Mrs Vivian sighed a heavy sigh. Thinking of to-night, so solemn and momentous, she forgot Zaidee, and no one mentioned her again.

The day advanced, and, amid the universal occupation, no one thought more of Zaidee. Her wandering habits—her dreamy disappearances and rambles, long permitted to the spoilt child—had come to their height in the confused and troublous interval since the old Squire's will was found ; and even Sophy, divided

between the glow of expected pleasure and the excitement of expected pain, had no time to think of her absent cousin. If her name did occur to any one among them, it was "so natural," as Aunt Blundell said, to suppose that Zaidee desired to be alone to-day. Everything had been laid out and arranged for her on the previous night by Mrs Vivian's own hands : there was no need to disturb her ; and no suspicion of the truth prompted any one to open the closed door of Zaidee's room.

Only Sermo, disturbed by the surrounding bustle, stalked wistfully up and down the chill staircase, and along the windy passages ; now and then, when he stretched himself upon the pavement, venting his dismay and wonder in a long low howl of pathetic inquiry. But no one had leisure to heed Sermonicus ; and it was not in his power, poor fellow, to communicate that last interview he had among the dark gorse and brambles, or to ask an interpretation of Zaidee's farewell. But there was something wanting to the faithful Sermonicus, and he stalked about silently, seeking for Zaidee, where no one should ever find the orphan again.

So it happened that the wintry nightfall was closing on the Grange, and Mrs Vivian, too heavy at heart to speak to any one, was slowly dressing to receive her guests, when Sophy, with a very pale, scared, terror-stricken face, burst into her mother's room. Sophy

was half-dressed, and it must indeed have been some matter of moment which interrupted her careful toilet on so great an occasion as this.

“Mamma, I cannot find Zaidee,” said Sophy, with breathless agitation. “I am afraid something has happened. I am afraid—oh, mamma, I beseech you come and see !”

“Zaidee, always Zaidee,” said Mrs Vivian, with the petulance of personal distress. “This child is nothing different from what she was a month ago. Let her alone.”

“But I cannot let her alone, for she is not there,” cried Sophy. “I believe she has done something—I am afraid—I do not know what to think—oh, mamma, what will become of us if Zaidee has broken her heart ?”

“Zaidee’s heart is too young to break,” said Mrs Vivian, folding her Shetland shawl round her shoulders. “It is too much to disturb me constantly with Zaidee. Sophy, child, your eyes are quite red, and your face flushed ; you can never appear down stairs if you excite yourself so. Come, then, I will go with you, and see what it all means.”

Sophy waited for nothing more, but ran on with her light in her hand, guiding her mother to Zaidee’s room. The night was dark and cloudy out of doors, and the narrow passages, a labyrinth of gloom, strangely

enclosed this white flitting figure, half-dressed and breathless with anxiety, and the grave outline of Mrs Vivian in her widow's weeds. Sophy ran on, eager and swift-footed. Mrs Vivian followed with a careful brow. Many things were on the mother's mind—many heavy and painful thoughts oppressed her; and even while she sought Zaidee, her heart was with Philip, forecasting the events of this decisive night.

In the darkness Sermo sits at Zaidee's chamber door, lifting his head to groan, pathetically, an appeal to some one within. Quite dark, and quite silent, this little chamber is the only dressing-room in the house where there is no stir of preparation; and a strange desolation and mystery seems in the closed door, where Sermo's supplication finds no answer. "Perhaps Zaidee is asleep," says Mrs Vivian in a subdued undertone. In spite of herself she has grown a little nervous, and hastens with an impatient hand to open the door.

Within, the darkness and the moonlight fill the little apartment, and the red cross of painted glass glows in the silvery light like a sign in the air. Nothing more—only Zaidee's dress—the soft, light, fairy fabric chosen for this greatest festival, spread out upon the bed, with the snowy gloves and bright ribbons which Aunt Vivian's kindness chose for the orphan before she was known as the heir. But no Zaidee—

no appearance of a living inhabitant in this lonely and deserted room.

“Zay! Zay!” cried Sophy, lifting up her candle, and wistfully gazing into the gloom. No one answered. There was such a dreary chill of solitude in the apartment, that it struck to the heart of the lookers-on. Mrs Vivian hurried forward in sudden terror, but there was nothing to be learned from the familiar furniture, the white dress glimmering on the bed, and the stormy moonlight looking in through the window. “She must be down stairs—somewhere; she may have forgotten the hour,” said Mrs Vivian, with a visible shudder. Sophy looked in her mother’s face for comfort, but found none. “Hush!—she must be down stairs,” repeated Mrs Vivian with a trembling lip. “Stay here till I find Zaidee.” And hurried and agitated was the step which echoed along the passage in the ears of Sophy. With superstitious terror Sophy withdrew within the door of her own room, and waited there.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

## LOST.

THE rooms down stairs were already lighted, and everything bright for the family festival. Margaret, restless and unhappy, had left the solitude of her own apartment before any one else was ready, and wandered here about the drawing-room, with such feverish strength of suppressed feeling in her face that her secret was scarcely safe even from eyes much less critical than Mrs Blundell's. When Mrs Vivian entered hurriedly, half dressed, and wrapped in her shawl, Margaret started with anxious terror. Every unexpected sound seemed to her full of fate.

"I cannot find Zaidee ; she is not in her room. Have you seen your cousin?" asked Mrs Vivian, as she hurried past to the library, without waiting an answer. The library was quite vacant, and Margaret followed in silent wonder, as her mother turned to the young ladies' room, and to her own private apartment, and, finding no one in either, came to the drawing-room

again, with much agitation, and rang the bell, almost violently. “Has any one seen Zaidee?—where can she be?—where can the child have gone?” cried Mrs Vivian, moving back and forward with troubled steps, and wringing her hands. “Ask all the servants—quick—and call Philip. Where is Zaidee? Can no one tell me when they saw her last?”

The whole household was startled by another loud, unsteady peal from the bell. Mrs Vivian had never been so much or so painfully excited in all her placid life. Several servants came in, in haste and confusion, to answer her summons. The small figure of the mistress of the house flitted about before the vacant seat of her domestic sovereignty in restless agitation. She could not be still; she could not stand or sit down, or cease wringing her delicate hands. “Where is Zaidee? who has seen the child?” exclaimed Mrs Vivian incessantly; and it was as much as she could do to repress the impatience of her involuntary anger at the slow answer or deliberate speech of those she questioned. The wave of her hand, and the “Quick! quick!” with which she hurried those tardy speakers, confused them only the more; and Philip found his mother surrounded by a group of bewildered servants, asking breathless questions, so close upon each other, that there was no space left to answer them. Margaret stood beside her, only half roused as yet, and

fearing little. Percy was hastening in by another door, wondering what was the matter. Philip knew quite as little as Percy what the matter was, but he came forward gravely, with the natural apprehension belonging to his excited state of mind. "When sorrows come, they come, not single spies"—and Philip had no difficulty in deciding that some new misfortune had befallen the house.

"Where is Zaidee? Has any one seen Zaidee?" The burden of Mrs Vivian's interrogations fell sharp upon the young man's ear. "Philip, come here—your cousin is gone. I can neither find her nor hear of her. A child—a mere child! God help us! where has she gone?"

The fact that Zaidee was missing had no effect upon any of the auditors at first; but Mrs Vivian's excitement had a great effect upon them. "Mother, what is it you fear?" asked Philip anxiously.

"I fear? Everything—everything! the most dreadful—the saddest," cried Mrs Vivian, once more wringing her hands. "Think what I myself said to her—think how she felt it. Boys, I implore you, do not wait here to speak to me. Seek her instantly; never rest till you find her, living or—Oh heaven! what do I say?"

"Zaidee is safe in Briarfورد; it is her way. You were never alarmed for her before; and all these

strangers coming, and so much to be done to-night. Mother, be calm, I beg of you," pleaded Margaret. "Even now we are not alone. Mother—dear mother ! I hear some one at the door."

As Margaret broke off, with a hurried, apprehensive glance towards the door, Aunt Blundell entered. Aunt Blundell's erect and lofty person was in grand costume, and her face composed to that solemnity with which people bear the misfortunes of others. But not even the entrance of the family censor subdued the stronger emotions of Mrs Vivian. Margaret shrank from her mother's side, humbled and self-conscious, dreading the critical, cold eye which now surveyed her. Mrs Vivian, quite unconscious of the hour—of her half-completed toilet, and expected guests, shrank not a whit from the observation of Aunt Blundell, but addressed her eagerly, catching at a new possibility—a last hope that some one had seen the missing girl.

"Maria, have you seen Zaidee?—tell me quick, for I am at my wit's end!" exclaimed Mrs Vivian, her usual vivacity quickened into impetuous restlessness. "No one has seen her to-day; she is not to be found in the Grange. For pity's sake, Maria, you, who notice everything, tell me if you have seen the child to-day?"

Mrs Blundell embraced the occasion with an eager haste to be useful. "Nothing but what might have

been expected," said Mrs Blundell. "I should have taken precautions. Of course she is ashamed to look us in the face. What have you done? Is it possible? Nothing but ask questions! Margaret, come with me to Zaidee's room, and we will see if she has left any trace."

"I have been there; there is nothing," said Mrs Vivian. "Do you hear me, boys? She must be found. Oh, Philip, Philip, if you had but yielded to her! If anything happens to Zaidee, I will never hold up my head again."

"In the mean time, you ought certainly to complete your toilet," said Mrs Blundell, reprovingly. "For my part, I could never permit myself to be so carried away by my feelings; and so much depends on you to-night—all the prospects of the children. I am ashamed to see you. Leave this affair to me."

But this was the thing of all others which Mrs Vivian could not do; not even though all her own ideas of decorum and propriety, strict as these were, coincided with her sister-in-law's advice, and though the sound of carriage-wheels without, and the bustle of approaching footsteps within, gave warning of repeated arrivals. The little group of servants retreated hastily; but Mrs Vivian stood still, or moved about with her restless step, wringing her hands—her white fleecy shawl thrown off, and hanging about her—her

dress incomplete, and her face full of agitation and terror. With a great effort she received and barely answered the salutations of several early guests. These punctual people wandered to stray corners, after they had paid their respects to her, with unaccountable embarrassment. It was impossible to see her, simple natural woman as she was, in spite of all her dignity, without being fully aware of the violent agitation which overpowered all her usual barriers of reserve.

Aunt Blundell and Margaret hastened up-stairs ; and, by the way, the elder lady took the opportunity of administering a severe lecture to her young companion, under which Margaret shrank with overpowering shame. Not to betray her feelings—not to compromise her womanly character ; injured pride and mortification rose high under these reproofs. Her own occasions were so immediate, and Zaidee's danger seemed so problematical, that Margaret forgot her cousin. Unwilling, offended, and proud, she followed Mrs Blundell, secretly chafing at the troublesome Zaidee, who exposed her to this most harassing annoyance of all.

Sophy stands shivering between her own apartment and Zaidee's deserted room. Left so long on the watch, Sophy trembles to the heart at every sound, and gazes on the mystical colours of that round window, pale in the moonlight, and upon the broken

red cross, which seems to hover over this solitary chamber, with awe and dread, that will not be repressed. A little longer of this vigil, and Sophy would think she saw something gliding about those gloomy corners—something gleaming out from the darkness like the lost Zaidee's melancholy eyes. Then there is that white ghostlike glimmer of the dress laid out on Zaidee's bed, and the bits of reflected colour from the window glowing like gems over it. Never before has Sophy's free heart owned such an oppression of mystery and dread. Dreary imaginations throng upon her. What if Zaidee has to be carried in here ere many hours are gone—to be laid as white and lifeless as her vacant garment upon that same bed? Sophy starts, with a cry, to hear the footsteps which approach her. Zaidee! Is it Zaidee? Have you not found her yet?

## CHAPTER XXXII.

## PHILIP'S FETE.

ALREADY many guests are assembled in Mrs Vivian's drawing-room ; already the kitchen is in despair over the dinner which begins to spoil ; already ladies and gentlemen begin to look at each other—to whisper and to wonder. The young head of the house—the hero of the night—is not to be seen anywhere, and his mother stands alone, disquieted and self-absorbed ; always wringing her hands, speaking to no one, and in a costume much unlike the dignified propriety of Mrs Vivian's usual dress. Mr Wyburgh, looking concerned and anxious, makes pilgrimages to one and another, bearing messages from Mrs Vivian. A vague expectation springs up among the company. Handsome Mr Powis keeps in a corner, and looks slightly frightened. What has happened ? The whole assembly would make up its mind to something very dreadful, but for the serious and sweet composure of Elizabeth Vivian's face.

“ Is some one ill, do you think ? I don’t see Margaret. Why, no one is here but Elizabeth. What can be the matter ? ” The whisperings grow. Elizabeth meanwhile takes upon herself her mother’s office, and goes calmly to and fro among the impatient guests, saying nothing of this visible excitement, but subduing it in her gentle way. Uncle Blundell, Colonel Morton, and Captain Bernard, are consulting in a corner. Colonel Morton’s face is redder than ever, and still more full than usual is the wide-open stare of his light grey eyes. “ Why could they not take proper precautions ? —what’s to be done ? —the little fool ! ” growls Colonel Morton. Handsome Mr Powis, hearing this, grows pale, and grows red, and is much excited. Mr Powis believes secretly, with great uneasiness, yet a little vanity, that Margaret Vivian must be breaking her heart for him, and that this is the cause of all the disturbance to-night.

The door opens, and every eye turns to it once more, full of expectation. It is Mrs Blundell who enters, followed more closely and more anxiously than before by Margaret. At sight of the latter, Mr Powis breathes freer, yet is disappointed. She has not broken her heart yet, and the general family discomposure is enough to account for Margaret Vivian’s pallid face and anxious eye.

“ I have found—not Zaidee, but at least some trace

of her," said Mrs Blundell with importance. "This is for you, and this for Elizabeth. I have no doubt they contain proper information. Compose yourself, my dear. I have no doubt Zaidee will be easily found again."

This was to Margaret, who shrank from Aunt Blundell's encouragement almost more than from her lectures. Mrs Vivian eagerly seized and broke open the letter addressed to her. Elizabeth came forward to receive hers. Philip and Percy, returning at the same moment, hurried to their mother's side ; and Sophy, her dressing sadly bungled, and her pretty face obscured with anxiety, joined the group before the reading was over. They stood apart on their own hearth, a troubled family, only half-conscious of the curious background of guests who watched them. These guests, for the most part, felt considerably embarrassed and uncomfortable. With some offence and much impatience, they looked on, "some explanation," as a senior here and there haughtily suggested, becoming more and more indispensable, as common courtesy, stretched to its utmost limit, began to give way.

Meanwhile Mrs Vivian read aloud the note which Zaidee had left for her. It was very simple and abrupt, as Zaidee herself, had she explained her conduct in person, might have been.

“ DEAR AUNT VIVIAN,—I can never come back again. I beg of you to be very kind, and never ask me. Perhaps you might find me if you searched long. Perhaps I may not be able to hide myself as I wish ; but to find me would be cruel, for I would die rather than come home. I beseech you to believe me, and to make Philip believe me ; for I will never return to the Grange ;—and though I love you all so well, and my heart breaks to think of this, yet I would rather go to the end of the world,—I would far rather die than see you any more. Dear Aunt Vivian, forgive me—it is not my fault. I might have burned that paper if I could have had courage ; but now I can do nothing but go away.

“ And I have nothing to ask but that Philip will never seek me. If he does, it is quite the same as killing me, Aunt Vivian ; for I will never live to take his right from him. I know you will be good to poor Sermo ; and I hope you will all be very happy, and never think of me any more. I bid you all good-by, dear Aunt Vivian. Good-by every one,—for I will never see you again.”

Here the unsigned note broke off abruptly with signs of tears. Other tears by this time were on the paper ; and it was with a choked voice that Mrs Vivian spoke once more, calling upon them to

search for Zaidee—to go forth at once, and lose no time.

Elizabeth's note enclosed Zaidee's little gold chain—her sole possession—and expressed only a humble petition that the bride would wear this simple ornament; but no clue to Zaidee's destination was in either of these letters. While their mother continued to urge their departure with tears and impatient eagerness, Philip and Percy stood consulting together; and, after a moment's hesitation, stepping forward before his brother and sisters, the young head of the house addressed the wondering guests.

“ Dear friends and neighbours,” said Philip, “ you have all come to do me honour. For my part, it was my office to have told you to-night that I no longer, as master of this house and my father's successor, deserved honour at your hands. A little while ago we discovered a will, leaving everything to my little cousin,” continued Philip, speaking fast, as his voice faltered. “ I designed to make it known immediately, but yielded to Zaidee's entreaty, and put off till to-night. To-night you have received a rude and discourteous reception. Pardon us, all who know this family; for Zaidee—poor little Zaidee—with a child's inconsiderate generosity, has gone away to-day. She is resolved not to take what she thinks my birthright—she has gone away, we cannot tell where. I am

sure no one will misunderstand—no one will blame me ; but I must leave you to seek this poor generous child.”

A murmur of wonder, of concern, and regret, and anxiety, followed Philip’s speech. There was a little crowd round him immediately, inquiring about this extraordinary change. It was well for Philip that a little tumult and confusion at the other end of the apartment startled his sympathising friends once more. A lady had fainted—perhaps Mrs Vivian, or Elizabeth, or Margaret. No—only Mrs Green, the Curate’s wife. The Curate himself was red with vexation and annoyance. Such a time for the exhibition of Angelina’s sensitive feelings ! As he took her up in his stout arms, and carried her into Mrs Vivian’s room, Mr Green could scarcely refrain from giving an indignant shake to the fainter. When every one else held out, what right had she, no particular favourite with the Vivians, to “give way” like this ?

The incident had one good result ; it released Philip, who set out immediately with his brother and Bernard. The questioners had recourse to Uncle Blundell and Colonel Morton—the ladies gathered round Mrs Vivian to console her—Mr Powis went away.

Yes, poor Margaret ! Mr Powis went away—heard of the family misfortune, but had no word of sympathy to give—saw you standing alone and sad, leaning

heavily on your mother's chair, but never came to offer the support and solace which he knew too well he could have bestowed. True, it is a pretence of offering help to Philip which covers the young Rector's withdrawal ; but hasty Philip has already gone upon his search, and Mr Powis can only mention his intentions to a servant as he leaves the Grange ; and so one hope is over, buried for evermore.

By-and-by one departure after another lightens the saddened house of those untimely guests. The lights blaze still in every corner, but every corner is deserted, and it is strange to note all this waste of preparation and exuberance of light. Here and there a servant lingers in hall and passage, on the outlook for intelligence ; but the family stand still, grouped together on the hearth, the mother and her three daughters trying to take comfort from each other, but unconsciously only sinking each other into deeper despondency as they discuss and question what has become of their lost child.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

## SUSPENSE.

THE night wears on, but no one has returned. The lights flare wildly in the hall of the Grange, where the cold night-wind blows in through the open door. The door is always open. There is constantly some one looking out—Sophy with her hair blowing about her tearful face ; Margaret, who is past weeping ; Mrs Vivian, and Elizabeth. They come and go perpetually to the windy threshold to look out into the darkness—the trees toss about in the breeze—the air is full of a sound of moved branches and running water—the clouds rush overhead, parted by sudden glimpses of a stormy moon. Nothing is to be seen in that world of black unfeatured night—nothing to be heard in that whispering breath of sound ; yet they are always looking out—always listening—always straining their baffled eyes into the gloom ; and fancy plays capricious pranks with them, calling forth distant voices and a mockery of footsteps to tantalise the watchers, who

can sometimes persuade themselves that Zaidee is coming home again, and sometimes shudder at the heavy tramp which rings in their ears like the march of a funeral. But still no one comes through the stormy darkness of this November night.

Within, a little party gather round the supper-table. Neither Uncle Blundell nor his wife find any irrecoverable misfortune in the events of the night, and the appetite of both remains unimpaired ; nor is Colonel Morton less philosophical. Much talk is current in this small company. Far more concerned than those watchers without, who speak only in troubled whispers, are these three good people within, to judge by their conversation, and the freedom with which they censure the carelessness and want of precaution which has brought this accident about. But Mrs Blundell's “consolation” is, as she says, that of course such a blundering ignorant child is sure to be found immediately ; while Colonel Morton declares that the little fool should be locked up and kept out of mischief. Seriously annoyed in reality, it is some comfort to the Colonel to have something to vent his displeasure openly upon ; for in his heart he cannot help secretly concluding his son Bernard “a great fool” for persisting in his engagement with a penniless girl. Mrs Blundell, after her fashion, though she is glad of it, thinks with the Colonel, and in her heart approves the better

wisdom of Mr Powis, and his withdrawal. “ There was nothing else to be expected—why should he throw away his advantages ? ” said Aunt Blundell ; yet Aunt Blundell, a strange combination of worldly views and family kindness, sighs for Margaret, and would very fain provide her with a better lover to induce her to forget the first.

Oh, heavy night ! the hearts of the watchers sicken as each lingering moment creeps and creeps away into the past. Sometimes, in despair, they go slowly back towards the family sitting - room, always straining eager ears into the silence. Then a supposed footstep —the cracking of a dry bough without, or the step of a passing servant within—rouses them to an agony of impatience once more. In the dead of night, the rain comes down heavily upon the roof, and on the beds of fallen leaves about the door. Even the shower does not dash against the windows as showers are wont to do, but falls in a dead, heavy, mystical downpouring from the leaden skies ; and they sit within, and look at each other, with eyes in whose depths of terror there are strange suggestions—or starting up, one by one, hasten to the door or the windows to gaze into the rain and into the night. All this while the lights are blazing in unprofitable profusion, and Aunt Blundell nods in a great easy-chair, and Colonel Morton has disposed himself comfortably on a sofa. Now and

then a drowsy servant crosses the hall to see if anything is wanted; but nothing is wanted; and the attendants, like the guests, steal away to fireside corners and fall asleep.

There is no sleep in the eyes of the ladies of the Grange, but an unspeakable impatient weariness—a longing to rush out into the dreary night, to share at least, though they may not advance, the search—takes possession of them all. Then almost sadder than the night comes the chill, unfriendly dawning, with its watery mists and icy breath. Another day—another day—and Zaidee has been an entire night from home.

By-and-by Philip, and Percy, and Bernard drop in from different quarters, one by one. Jaded, worn-out, and dispirited are they all, for there is not a trace, east nor west, of the lost girl. Philip has gathered a little band of followers after him. Philip has traversed miles of country to-night—far away to the sea-coast, where lives a woman who was once Zaidee's nurse, and a servant at the Grange—inland upon the great road which leads to a great adjacent town, and through it to other towns—to London and the world. But what would Zaidee do in the world? And Philip thought he was secure of finding her in her old nurse's cottage; but the woman had not seen Zaidee for four or five years, and scarcely recollected even the young

Squire. Philip, at his wit's end, had at last unwillingly come home.

What can be done? Mrs Vivian walks about the room, still wringing her hands, and exclaiming in despair, "How young she is—how innocent—how ignorant—how unacquainted with life;" for Mrs Vivian not only grieves for Zaidee lost, but with even a deeper pang for the young girl abandoned to the world. All last night, Mrs Vivian's mind was dismayed with thoughts of suicide. When she closed her eyes, it was to see in imagination Zaidee's motionless white form laid upon that little bed where Zaidee's festival dress lies solemnly under the dawning light—and to realise the dreadful bringing home, not of Zaidee, but of all that remained of her. Now, with a changed phase of self-torture, Mrs Vivian recalls those thousandfold snares, and temptations, and pitfalls of evil, for which her own inexperienced and innocent mind holds "the world" in horror. "It would have been nothing for a boy; a boy could come to no great harm," said Mrs Vivian; "but Zaidee—a girl—a woman—God help my poor child!"

It is very hard and difficult to decide what can be done next. "We must do everything," says one and another; but how to begin is the question. Philip only says nothing. Philip is feverish, restless—cannot sit still or lie down, or take any refreshment. Aunt

Blundell by this time has had the breakfast-table arranged, and presides at it, full of suggestions. Excellently well Aunt Blundell means ; but it is misery to have a full meal spread before them, when they are all so sick at heart ; and Philip, for his part, thinks she means to torture him when she presses him to eat.

“ Where there is so much confusion, Philip, it may be some time before you have a well-ordered meal again,” says Mrs Blundell with dignity ; “ and you must take nourishment — it is most important — or the frame will sink under all this fatigue.”

Hearing her sister-in-law speak, Mrs Vivian stopped behind Philip’s chair, fondly put her hands upon his head, smoothed down his dark curls, and drew them back to kiss his fair, young, manly brow. “ Try to take something, Philip — try, my poor boy,” said Mrs Vivian with a trembling voice. Philip, in his excitement and exhaustion, fairly broke down.

“ It is my fault, mother. I have driven her to this,” said Philip, with something that sounded like a sob ; and starting up, he buttoned his over-coat closely over his breast. “ I must go—I cannot rest—I must seek poor Zay,” said the young man hurriedly. “ Poor Zay — poor child — she has thrown away everything for me. I *must* find her, wherever she is.”

That day passed — alas ! and other days ! — weary days, weary nights—hours taken up and occupied by

nothing but this search ; but no one had seen Zaidee Vivian, and not the faintest trace was to be found of where she had gone. Philip travelled far and near over all the country, wrote letters, published advertisements, did everything that man could do, but found only a few tantalising disappointments, and no Zaidee. Elizabeth's marriage was delayed—the whole domestic economy of the Grange was disturbed and shaken—the household kept in perpetual agitation by varying hopes and fears ;—but still Philip had not found Zaidee, and the expectation of finding her lessened day by day.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

## GUILT.

WHATEVER might be the ordinary character of Mrs Green's effusions of susceptibility, there could be no doubt that her fainting fit, on the night of Zaidee's disappearance, was genuine and sincere. Poor Angelina was a very coward ; she dared not for her life rise up and say that she had the clue for which every one looked in vain. She trembled under her husband's eye with a secret terror. Fear, the strongest passion of the weak, overpowered Angelina. Secresy and guilt are so near akin that the one is apt at all times to feel like the other. And if the Curate's wife had been the kidnapper of Zaidee, she could not have been more overwhelmed with terror of discovery. The good Curate, much annoyed and discomfited by her swoon, softened to see the real distress of his tender-hearted bride. She was so visibly afraid of him, too, that his honour was piqued to justify himself. "Why, Lina, you make an ogre of me," said Mr Green, with sundry grimaces of discomposure. "You might have chosen

a better time to faint, I confess. When all the Vivians stood it out, what was it to you ? But I don't intend to make any lecture. Come along. Lina ! are you really ill, now ? The girl trembles like a leaf. What was Zaidee Vivian to you ? Well, I'll not say that, if it vexes you. If I had ever thought you cared so much for that child !”

“ Oh, Mr Green ! don't speak to me,” sobbed Angelina.

“ I won't till you can hear reason,” said the straightforward John. And he took his sensitive wife under his arm and trudged her away down the stormy pathway from the Grange. But he felt her tremble so, as she clung to him—he heard such a sound of suppressed tears and sobbing in the lulls of the wind—that the Curate could not keep his resolution. “ What is it all about, Lina ?” asked Mr Green, facing round against the wind, and looking at her in dismay. Mr Green could see only a shrinking figure and veiled face, but could not perceive the terrified expression—the weak despair, in Angelina's eye. “ You can't think that Zaidee is lost ? You can't think it possible that a girl of her age, knowing nothing, should be able to elude Philip Vivian and the strict search he will make ? Dry your eyes, Lina ; don't be such a little fool. As sure as we are going home to-night, Zaidee will come by-and-by—no fear.”

Angelina listened—made a shivering tremulous response—she hoped so—and went on with her husband in silence, afraid to awake his suspicions by another word. She might have saved herself at least this fear, for Mr Green lumbered on, the soul of rude sincerity, who neither knew deceit nor suspected it ; nor even in his wildest imaginations could the Curate have fancied her inculpated in such a mystery as Zaidee's escape.

A sleepless night was this for Angelina. If Zaidee did come back—if Zaidee was found in Mrs Disbrowe's, recommended by Mrs Green, what would Mrs Green's husband—what would all the world say ? And if Zaidee never came back, what a secret was this lying night and day on Angelina's heart ! Would it be better to make up her mind boldly, and confess the truth at once ? Perhaps so ; but the Curate looked so severe, so determined in the pale morning light, that his wife only shrank into a corner and cried. What could she do ?

She took the usual expedient of cowardice, in the first place. She waited—waited day after day, in nervous expectation of hearing that Zaidee had been found—or, with still darker terror, dreading that Zaidee, being found, had sought for herself some other means of conclusion than the pool under Briarford Hill. Living thus, from day to day, in a state of nervous expectation and suspense, the poor foolish

wife of the Curate fell ill at last. Angelina was rather glad than otherwise of the excuse thus given her for fairly taking her bed and shutting herself up ; but lying all day long thinking of this oppressive secret, brought her not a whit nearer a settlement of it. And day passed after day, but Zaidee Vivian was not found.

Mrs Green's illness continued so long that it procured her the unusual honour of a call from Mrs Wyburgh. The Vicaress came in to Angelina's dim bed-chamber, a very mass of shawls and wrappings. Angelina's bed-chamber was not only cloudy with drawn curtains and closed blinds, but was somewhat chill besides, and by no means comfortable. Something of the effect which a bright fire might have produced, the vision of Mrs Wyburgh gave ; but Angelina scarcely ventured to turn her pale face from the wall to answer the inquiries of the Vicaress.

“No, not a word can one hear of that poor darling yet,” said kind Mrs Wyburgh ; “and my blessing on her this day, wherever she may be. What should make her wise at her age ? I'll never say it was wise of Zaidee to run away ; but well I know it was all the love at her heart.”

Angelina made no answer. She had much ado to keep herself from a weak passion of tears.

“I hear ye all say it was wrong of Zaidee,” con-

tinued the Vicaress. “Ne'er a one of you all but blames her ; but I'll never cast a stone at you, Zaidee dear—never an evil word will I say. Blessings on them was so good to the motherless child, and blessings on the orphan that had it in her heart to lose herself for them. I'd give half of Briarford,” said Mrs Wyburgh with animation, “to hear the child was safe ; but I'd not thank any one to tell me where she was—ay, dear heart, for all I like her well.”

“Oh, Mrs Wyburgh, will you tell me why ?” cried Angelina anxiously.

“My dear, I'd be bound to tell,” said the Vicaress, “to let Philip and the lady know, and betray the innocent lamb. 'Tis God takes care of such. She'll never come to harm in the world ; but do you think I'd be the one to balk her goodwill and the love in her heart ? So that's why I wouldn't listen to hear where she was.”

“Mrs Wyburgh,” said Angelina with great humility, “I want to tell you something. I have kept it a secret, because of what she said. I have never told Mr Green ; and I am afraid—I cannot help it—I am so much afraid to tell him now.”

Mrs Wyburgh interrupted the confession by a motion of her hand. “Tell it to him before you tell it to me. My dear, you are young ; you must make

a good beginning ; and sure, of every one in the world, there's none has the same right as he."

"But I am afraid ; oh, Mrs Wyburgh, I am afraid," said the helpless Angelina.

"Five-and-twenty years," said the Vicaress, reckoning upon her dimpled fingers, "I've been the nearest friend to Richard, and he to me. Do you think one of us was ever afraid to tell a thing to the other? My dear, if we had, we'd never have been here. He could not do a thing myself did not know ; no more could I with Richard, though he's a man as well deserves to be feared as any in this world ; but I'd as soon have thought of fearing daylight as fearing Richard. Take thought of it, you poor child—you've got no one to look to you. What should you be afraid of? The man's your own—didn't you make choice of him? And I wouldn't build up secrets, if I were you, between him and me."

"Indeed, I am sure I cannot tell what to do," said Mrs Green, half weeping between offence and real distress.

"Poor soul, doesn't he see through you, out and out ?" sighed Mrs Wyburgh, under her breath, impatient with the weakling before her. "But, my dear, you had best tell him," she said, with much self-restraint, expressing herself aloud.

And Angelina courageously made up her mind to

try. When her husband came to her disconsolate bedside that same evening, the invalid began by telling him of Mrs Wyburgh's visit. "It is hard to understand her sometimes," said Angelina, with a great palpitation at the heart. "She said to-day she would be glad to hear that Zaidee was safe, but not where she was—if, indeed, any one could know."

"I'll tell you what, Lina," said the Curate, somewhat sternly, "if *I* knew any one that was in the secret, I'd not only compel them to tell, but shut them out for ever from any kind offices of mine. I could never forgive any one in his right senses for aiding, in such a fatal project, this wild foolish girl."

Angelina shrank, terror-stricken ; her lips grew pale, her breast heaved, but fear gave her a power of self-restraint quite unusual to her. She had not strength to tell her secret ; but she had strength, by a most heroical effort, to keep in her tears and subdue every expression of her true state of mind. Good Mr Green went off immediately to his study, frowning at the very possibility of Zaidee's secret being known to any one and remaining unrevealed. Meanwhile Zaidee's secret remained heavy like a stone on his wife's apprehensive heart. Human creatures know so little of each other—he never for an instant suspected her.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

## CHANGED DAYS.

THE spring comes chill, with its lengthening pale days upon the Grange—young buds are struggling into life on the wind-tossed trees—and the sunsets soften out of their wintry red into a tracery of gold—but the time of crocuses and primroses is not yet. The white-cheeked Christmas rose, and the melancholy little vestal snowdrop—impersonation of this pallid season—are all the flowers which even Mrs Vivian's sheltered flower-garden can produce in honour of Elizabeth's wedding-day. Postponed from week to week, and from month to month, the time has at last arrived for this great family event. To-morrow, if it be the windiest March morning that ever blew in Cheshire, cannot delay any longer this interrupted bridal. We are on the eve, too, of other goings away, and there is little rejoicing among us to-night.

Captain Bernard has the place of honour beside Mrs Vivian in this great bright drawing-room, which

cannot look anything but cheerful and home-like. Bernard Morton is past his first youth, and has never been so handsome as Mr Powis. An unmistakable ardour and glow of temperament are in his deep dark eyes and sunburnt face ; but it is ardour restrained and kept in subjection by a will and character stronger than itself. His young brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law do not quite understand Captain Bernard ; he is a little too mature and full-grown a man for their youthful comprehension ; and Percy, irritable and wayward, who admires and adores his beautiful sister with the fervour of a poet, and the affectionate tenderness of a younger brother, chafes at Captain Bernard's good sense, and vows he is not worthy of Elizabeth. Elizabeth herself only smiles, as Bernard would smile if he heard these words. These two, who are by no means like, do yet perfectly understand each other, and there is no cloud upon the confidence with which they look forward to their new life.

Except in the extreme simplicity of her dress, there is no change upon Elizabeth. Only one ornament breaks the undecorated plainness of the bride's costume, and that is Zaidee's little gold chain, which Elizabeth says she will never lay aside till Zaidee is found. There is something admirably harmonious and in keeping in these plain garments of Elizabeth's. She is no longer a girl, to shrink with shy confusion from

the kind glances round her—but a woman, simple, humble, esteeming every other better than herself, Elizabeth sits composed and silent behind her mother, ready to enter with sweet gravity and thoughtfulness into her altered lot.

Much different is Margaret, working with nervous haste at the table, not only grieved, but wounded to the heart. Margaret's eye swims with unshed tears, and a heat of petulant and passionate feeling is over all her face. She cannot work fast enough, or move about with sufficient rapidity, to cheat the pain at her heart ; and her heart is not softened, but irritated by her grief. A certain acrimony, even, has stolen into poor Margaret's tones. She is bitterly ashamed of herself, and overpowered with mortification and self-reproach ; but she cannot subdue the strength of passion, which assumes this character—she cannot keep down the heat and flush of injury, of shame and disappointment, which burns at her heart night and day.

Sophy sits apart unoccupied, patting with her foot upon the carpet, beating upon the palm of one hand with the fingers of the other. Sophy is going over, in anticipation, all the events of to-morrow—realising how Elizabeth will look in her bride's dress—wondering how she herself will become *her* costume as bridesmaid. She cannot keep herself from being interested,

from being a little excited, and from no small share of pleasurable expectation ; yet Sophy sighs for Zaidee, and puts her hand upon her heart, where there is a pain and a vacancy, as she thinks, since ever her companion went away. Poor Zay ! where is she now ?—where can she be to-night ? And it will be well for Sophy if her meditations do not end in a fit of tears.

But Sophy is conscious of the presence of Aunt Blundell—Margaret is angrily conscious of it—and even Philip and Percy make some small sacrifices in acknowledgment of their relative's eye. Mrs Blundell's forces are in nowise abated by "what she has come through." She still finds it possible to bear her sister Vivian's misfortunes with exemplary resignation, and to set a good example to the young people. Sitting with a basket before her, full of snowy ribbons, Mrs Blundell is making wedding-favours ; and the rustle of her dress each time she moves her arm, the demonstration with which she threads her needle, the sigh with which she adds every completed ribbon to the heap, keeps every one informed of her proceedings. Mrs Blundell sits with great state in a great chair, the easiest in the room ; but it is hard to calculate how much the presence of Mrs Blundell sits heavy upon the minds of the assembled family here.

Philip has a book before him, but is not reading ; and no one, save Aunt Blundell, has a word to say.

Philip's hand, supporting his head, glimmers out of the mass of hair which droops over it—his eye looks far into space, as the eye of youth is wont to do; but meditation has ceased to be a favourite exercise with Philip. These few months have carried the youth entirely out of the region of dreams. The actual world, wherein, as into a desert, his poor little cousin has plunged and lost herself for him—the real toils and hardships by which he must seek his fortune—are present to Philip's eyes. He might have lived and died a very good Squire of Briarfورد—might have deliberated over the commonplace changes of his peaceful life—and been slow, and sure, and steady, as ever country gentleman was. But necessity has stirred the young man out of the calm routine of living, and plunged him into life: and Zaidee has helped to form the character which was her own childish ideal of man. Prompt to do, and quick to discern—strong against fatigue, and patient in the very front of hopelessness—the search which he pursued so earnestly has made Philip Vivian. He has been at school while he has been following the track of the lost child; and now that the search seems hopeless, Philip is about to make his start in life.

Last of all the family group—save Percy, who sits yonder in a corner, in the dark, observing them all—is Mrs Vivian, who, much unlike her wont, sits idle in her

great chair, holding in her hand a white handkerchief, which she occasionally presses upon her eyes, perhaps to keep tears from falling, perhaps only to relieve some pain in them. Elizabeth is to be married and go away to-morrow ; and throughout this whole great house there is a want of Zaidee—a visible void and empty place ; and a perpetual aching in Mrs Vivian's kind heart brings the orphan before her—brings before her her own ill-advised and hasty words. If Zaidee had been here, in this room and at home as of old, the chances are ten to one that, bestowed in some out-of-the-way corner, you never would have observed Zaidee ; yet it is strange how vividly every one who enters here feels that she is gone.

In the mean time, when all are so silent, Mrs Blundell, the chorus of the family drama, runs on in an explanatory monologue—a recitative, familiarly revealing the history of the time.

“ I wonder, for my part, if I had not come yesterday, who would have thought of providing *these* ? ” said Mrs Blundell, as she deposited another wedding-favour upon the heap. “ No doubt every one is very much occupied, but it is always my principle to neglect nothing—especially to preserve all the ordinary decouums at such a time as this ; for nothing can look worse, I assure you, than excessive feeling. Philip, when do you go away ? ”

“Next month, aunt,” answered Philip, starting to hear himself addressed.

“I never object to India,” said Mrs Blundell. “Everything has such a tinge of wealth, I suppose, that comes from the East ; and it does not matter very much what one does there, so long as one grows rich. Of course,” continued Aunt Blundell, in her character of example—“of course you understand me that I could never mean any one to do anything improper, or unbecoming a gentleman, even so far away ; but business loses its vulgarity : an Indian merchant is not a trader, but a nabob. And Sir Francis really advises you to turn your thoughts to commerce ? That is what your mother tells me, Philip.”

With an effort Philip roused himself to answer. “If I can rise in the service of the Company, I will ; but if I cannot, aunt, or the progress is too slow, Sir Francis introduces me to his friends, and to that Prince among them who helped himself to his fortune, and bids me hesitate at nothing which comes to my hand. I do not see, indeed,” said Philip, colouring slightly, “why I should hesitate to do what Sir Francis Vivian did.”

“Sir Francis Vivian represents the younger branch,” said Mrs Vivian ; “but you, Philip, are the head of the house.”

“I have heard my sister Vivian say this a hundred

times. What does it matter, when there is nothing but the empty honour—the title and no more?" said Mrs Blundell; "but you, Philip, are a mere Quixote. The Grange is yours by nature, in the first place; and even if it was not, what is to be done with it, now that Zaidee is gone? Why should the estate be lost and yourself banished, while there is no claimant of the lands? Don't speak to me. I would let the child have all when she came to claim it. Poor little foolish thing, I would look for her too; but I would not throw up everything, and leave the country, as *you* intend to do."

"I leave the country to make my fortune," said Philip, with a momentary smile; "and banished or not, Aunt Blundell, the Grange is no longer mine. If I could have accepted it in any case, I should have taken it from Zaidee—poor Zaidee, who has lost herself for love of us; and I would gladly stay to find my dear little cousin," continued the young man, with a slight faltering; "but I have done all I can do, and I leave the matter in Bernard's hands. My mother will stay here at home till Zaidee is found—and after Zaidee is found, to take care of her, I hope. As for Percy and I, we are travelling paladins—we must go forth to the wars."

Sophy, from her seat apart, echoed this last word with an audible sob. There was a dead silence after

it ; and even Mrs Blundell put her handkerchief to her eyes.

“Percy too !” said the worldly but not unfeeling aunt. “I cannot say that you are not right, but I am sorry with all my heart. Ah, Elizabeth, my love ! I congratulate *you* ; but I am sure, for all the rest—those who go away and those who stay—I have no choice but to grieve for them.”

Though this was not very consolatory, no one made any response to it. Mrs Vivian shed some tears secretly behind her handkerchief ; Sophy sobbed at intervals, restraining herself with all her might ; while Margaret sat fiercely working by the table, heated and angry and miserable, defying herself and all the world. All the world seemed to Margaret personified in Aunt Blundell, and she chafed under the intolerable scrutiny of these observing eyes.

They were glad all of them to part for the night ; but when Elizabeth passed into her mother’s dressing-room for one last hour of tenderest intercourse, full of tears and pain, yet not unhappy, and Sophy stole softly after her, to sit at Mrs Vivian’s feet and share the interview, Margaret, forlorn and miserable, stood in the dark alone, and looked out upon those dreary melancholy roads, whence no passenger ever came. They stretched away before her into the misty horizon, so vacant and bare of life—paths which no one ever

seemed to tread ; and Margaret softened out of her resentful mood, thinking of herself forsaken and of Zaidee lost. To-morrow Elizabeth must go away a bride ; by-and-by another to-morrow must carry Philip and Percy forth “ into the wars ; ” and then, alas for the dead and solitary life which would remain to the dwellers in the Grange ! These youths could fight open-handed with their evil fortune, and Zaidee—poor Zaidee !—had fled from hers ; but Margaret, in the martyrdom of her womanhood, could neither fight nor fly.

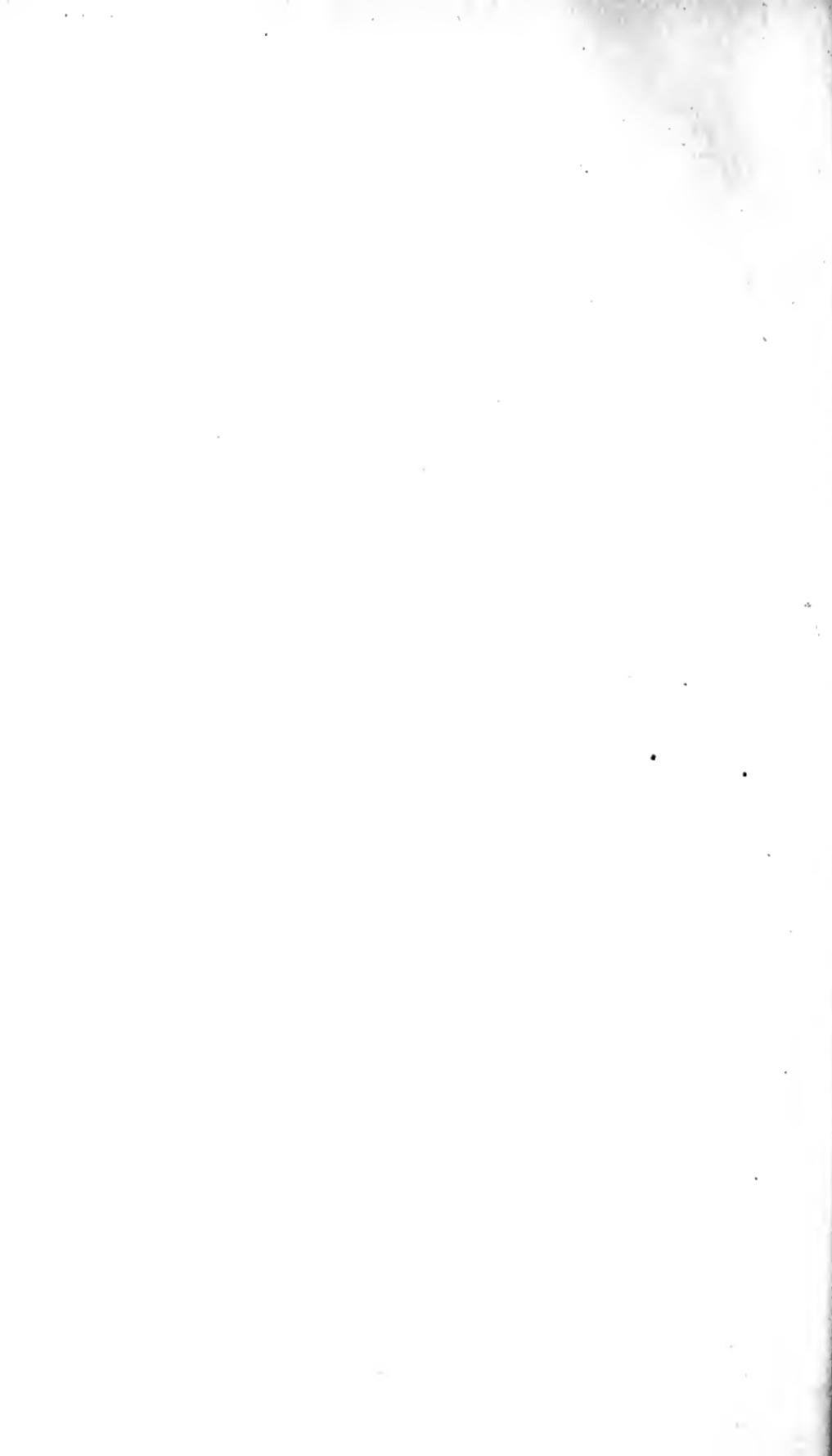
She went away drearily to her own room. Sermo was lying in the vacant passage, so much like one who no longer cared where he threw himself to rest, that Margaret’s heart was touched. “ Poor Sermo, the day is changed even for you ! ” she said, as she stooped to caress him, and softening tears fell upon Sermo’s face. Then her door was closed ; the door was closed in Mrs Vivian’s room ; darkness and silence and sleep reigned in the Grange, where there was much sadness, much anxiety, much trouble, but still a home.

But out of doors those solitary roads stretched away into the misty sky—out of doors the moonlight, lying white upon the country, made a deep mystery of shadow on every hand, and a wistful wind crept to and fro, and a whisper ran among the trees. Alas for the wayfarer, forlorn and solitary, in this world of silence !

The red cross hangs afloat in the silvery air which streams into Zaidee's vacant room, and the room is solemnly undisturbed and sacred to her memory; there is not a piece of furniture displaced, and everything silently suggests and calls for the wanderer. But Zaidee is gone away no one can tell where—a lonely traveller on the highways of the world.

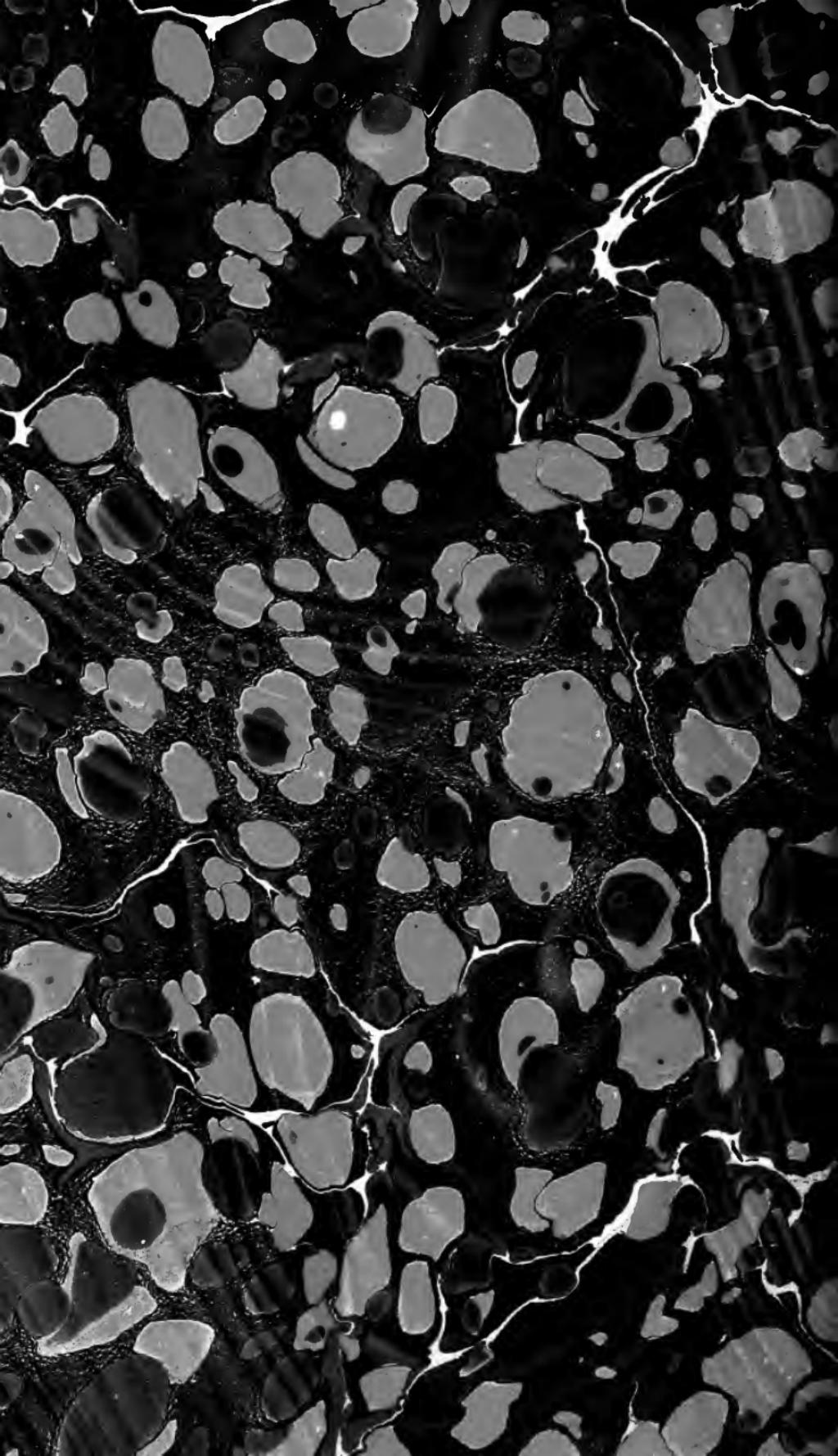
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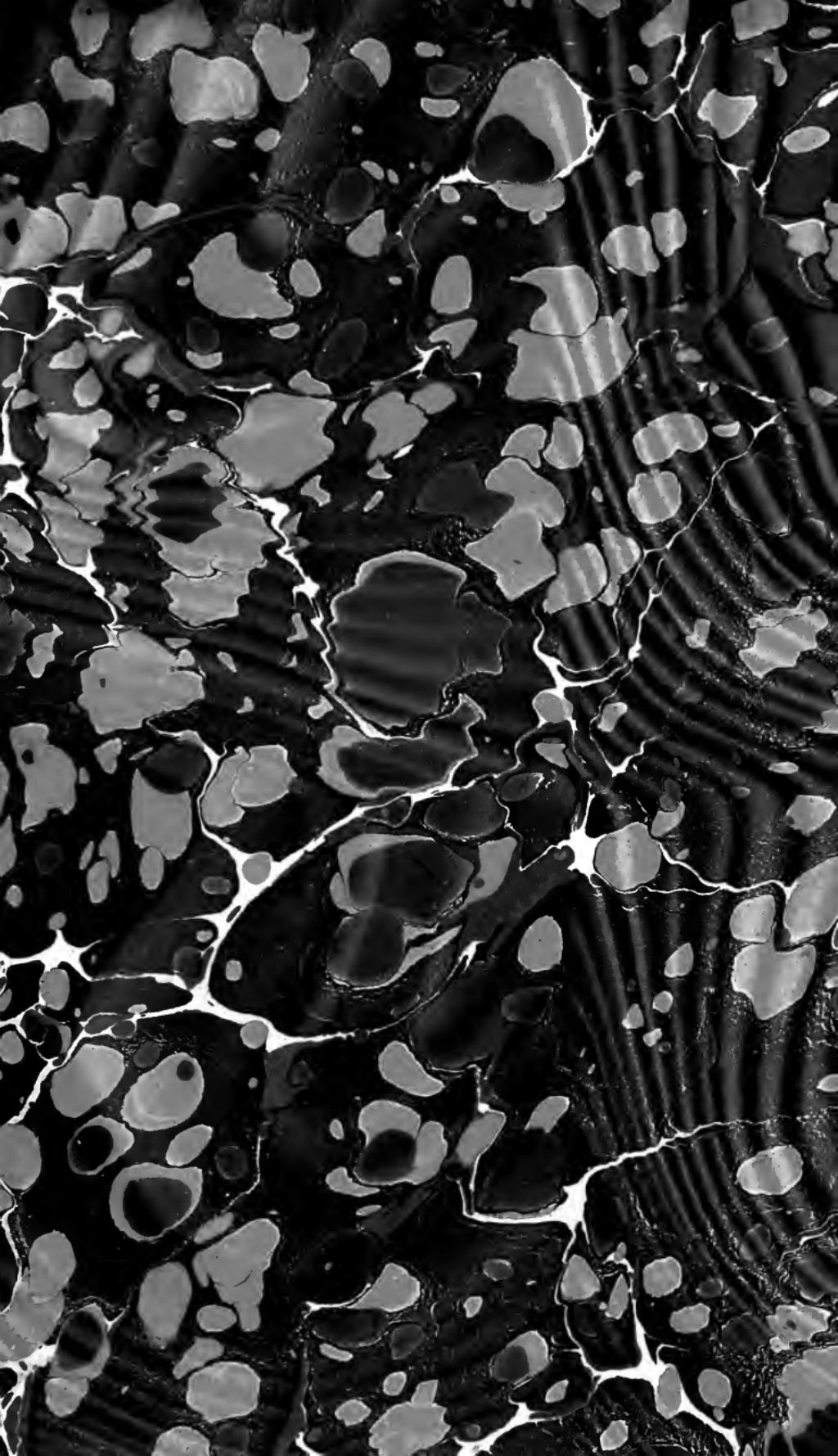




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